

## CHALLENGES CONFRONTING VIGILANTE GROUPS IN EFFECTIVE CRIME CONTROL IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

Vigilante groups' contributions to crime control are invaluable. However, the activities of vigilante groups have faced operational and institutional challenges. These challenges have negatively affected the operations of vigilante groups in crime control in Benue State. The study investigated the challenges of vigilante groups in crime control in Benue State with a view to suggesting ways of curbing those challenges for enhanced effectiveness of vigilante groups in Benue State. Three Local Government Areas – Katsina-Ala, Makurdi, and Oturkpo, were selected across the three Senatorial districts in Benue State for the study. The population of the study comprised vigilante operatives, religious leaders, traditional rulers and members of the public. The study adopted a survey design. Questionnaire and in-depth interview (IDI) were used to generate data from 367 respondents using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling were deployed for the selection of respondents and interviewees. Twelve interview sessions were conducted across the sampled Local Government Areas. The quantitative data were presented in frequency and percentages while qualitative data were presented in narrative form. The study identified lack of logistics, shortage of crime fighting equipment, absence of enabling legal instrument for the operation of vigilante groups, human rights violation, corruption, insufficient training among vigilantes and vested interests, as the challenges of vigilante group in the study area. The study recommends the enactment of laws recognizing vigilante groups; provision of needed crime fighting equipment by stakeholders; adequate funding, provision of logistic support as well as proper training and reorientation of vigilante operatives to respect the fundamental human rights of suspects.

**Keywords:** Crime fighting Equipment; Human Rights Violation; Legal Instruments; Vigilante Groups; Religious Leaders.

## Introduction

Concerns about crime cuts across the global community, and there is unanimity among both leaders and the followers about the need for a solution to the problem. In spite of the various concerted strategies to combat crime globally, crime rate seems to have been continuously high. According to the World Population Review of Crime Rate (2022), crime rate by country indicated the following: Venezuela, 83.76%, Papua New Guinea, 80.79%, South Africa, 76.86%, Afghanistan, 76.31%, Honduras, 74.54%, Trinidad and Tobago, 71.63%, Guyana, 68.74%, Brazil, 67.49%, El Salvador, 67.79%, Jamaica, 67.47%, Bangladesh, 63.9%, Argentina, 63.82%, Puerto Rico, 62.82%, and Nigeria, 64.06%. The above crime rates indicated that crime is high across countries of the world.

The global upsurge in crime rate may be attributed to the failure of the formal crime control strategies to effectively checkmate the incidence of crime. The ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the formal mechanisms of crime control probably accounts for the emergence and persistence of crimes such as kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, rape, assassination, theft, ethnic Militia activities among others in different parts of Nigeria including Benue State. It appears there is a crime problem in Benue State which seems to have overwhelmed the formal crime control agencies in the State. Crime control in Benue State appears ineffective ostensibly due to the nature of the security architecture adopted by the formal agencies of crime control (Anyo, et al 2020).

In any society where crime control mechanisms are functional, such a society is relatively stable and peaceful thereby guaranteeing the people the right to pursue their socio-economic, political aspirations and other legitimate aspirations without obstruction, fear and disturbance. Conversely, in a society where crime control strategies are dysfunctional, the people find it difficult to pursue their political and socio-economic goals and other needs. For centuries, Benue communities have been preoccupied with the task of finding the most viable, reliable and dependable crime control strategy to checkmate and counter the menace of crime in order to have a peaceful environment where the aspirations of the people could be attained. Crime remains one of the phenomena that have constituted an encumbrance to the attainment of the people's desire for a secured and orderly society (Anyo, et al 2020).

Till date, the formal agencies of crime control such as the military and police in Benue State have been unable to guarantee safety of life and property of the people. In addition, the services (police) of formal crime control agencies seem to be expensive, and time wasting (consuming). This perceived gap in the operational efficiency and service delivery necessitated the emergence of vigilante groups in Benue State. Vigilante groups have become essential part of everyday security among communities in Benue State. The patronage of vigilante groups on the other hand, has proven remarkable in complementing the peoples' quest for cost effective, accessible, rapid, and swift community evolved mechanism of crime control and order maintenance. However, vigilante groups are faced with enormous challenges such as lack of logistics: patrol van, torch lights, rain coat and uniforms, lack crime fighting equipment among others, which hamper their crime control activities. These challenges have negatively affected the effectiveness of vigilante groups in crime control in Benue State, in particular.

Alemika et al (2003) identified the challenges of vigilante groups to include: lack of funding, harassment from the police when carrying out their duties, lack of proper training and adequate arms, lack of basic operational equipment such as flashlights, rain boots, rain coats, identity cards, whistles, and uniforms. The Justice for All Group (2012) noted that vigilante groups, lack technical support and funding intervention from the State for enhanced operations of vigilante. Justice for All Group also identified the absence of relevant training in tackling the trend

and sophistication of criminality as a challenge of vigilantes (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013). Alemika e tal (2003) stated that the meagre remuneration paid to the local vigilante groups by the community has been one of the factors limiting the effectiveness of the group in their security services. This implies that, funding challenges may lure vigilantes into temptation of engaging in criminal activities.

Knowland (2014), observed that in Mexico, certain vigilante groups that started by helping in countering kidnapping and drug dealing sometimes deviated into drug dealing and exportation themselves; due to lack of adequate remuneration and strict regulation of their activities by the State. The foregoing presupposes that the needed funding of vigilante groups was not provided for, and State regulatory policies were not available to checkmate their excesses. According Onwuegbusi (2017), scholars have raised a number of concerns ranging from the character of the vigilantes, the manner of recruitment of the operatives, the training they receive, their remuneration and upkeep, the relationship between vigilantes and the public, to the allegiance of the vigilantes to the State authority to the level of cooperation between vigilante groups and the conventional security agencies (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

In a similar vein, Umeagbalasi, (2012) argues that vigilante group members have often slacked in their objective mission and channeled their loyalty to the State both at the National, State and the Community levels. It is argued that vigilantes have turned their loyalty to the State authorities, helping in actualizing the motives, objectives or goals of State authorities and have often played along with their preferences because of monetary benefits. This trend in vigilantism is obtainable in various communities where the vigilantes would submit to the wishes of agencies of the State or where they are used as instruments of power tussle among individuals aspiring for leadership positions. The consistent changes in vigilante groups' loyalty from community to State appear to emanate from the lack of remuneration for vigilantes. The direct involvement of the State in the activities of vigilante groups is pointer to the usurpation of vigilantism by the State.

There are diverse researches on the challenges of vigilante groups in Nigeria and elsewhere. However, none of such studies was carried out in Benue State to investigate the similarities or dissimilarities of such challenges, hence, there is gap in knowledge. Again, Benue State in particular, and Nigeria in general, is caught up in the web of security challenges that appear to overwhelm the formal agencies of crime control, hence the resurgence of vigilante groups as complementary community-evolved crime control organs. However, vigilante groups are confronted with challenges which needed to be investigated and resolved for enhanced crime control in Benue State, Nigeria. This study therefore, examines the challenges confronting vigilante groups in crime control in Benue State. In doing this the study attempted to answer the following questions: What are the challenges of vigilante groups in Benue State and how can the identified challenges be addressed to reposition vigilante groups for effective crime control? The objectives of the paper include to: identify the challenges confronting vigilante groups in Benue State; and suggest ways of mitigating those challenges for effective crime control in the study area.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

In this study, some concepts are clarified to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding of usage. The concepts of vigilante groups and crime control are clarified.

**Vigilante Group:** Vigilante groups are generally viewed as local, participatory, unofficial, voluntary and simplistic community evolved agencies. They are established by landlords, tenants, age grades, youth associations, the community and other non-State interest groups. The

composition of local vigilante groups is mostly people residing within the community. Vigilante groups are not formalized agencies and have no written operational guidelines. Vigilante groups are also not uniformed, ranked, and salaried organizations but voluntary associations. They are financed by the community through community contributions and their activities are not formally recognized by the State. They resolve disputes between neighbours, restrain antisocial behaviours, and ensure security of lives and property (Anyo et al, 2020). For the purpose of this study, vigilante groups are civil society-initiated security and safety efforts that emerged to fill a security gap.

**Crime Control:** Dambazau (2007) defines crime control as a pattern of attitudes and behaviours directed both at reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security to positively influence the quality of life, and to develop environments where crime cannot flourish. He further asserts that crime control involves the idea of solving crime problems, arresting suspects, prosecuting and incapacitating offenders. For this study, crime control is the concerted effort of the community to counter and checkmate the incidence of crime in the society.

### Literature Review

This section of the study reviews literature on the evolution and challenges of vigilante groups.

In North America, vigilantism dates back to the eighteenth century and remains relevant to-date (Brown, 1975). In 1851 and 1856, concerned citizens in San Francisco organized vigilante committees that forcibly restored peace and order (World Book Encyclopedia cited in Nwaeze, 2010). Before 1900, many vigilante groups were formed in frontier areas of the United States. Newby (2012) suggested that the continuing use of a variety of vigilante groups in different contexts in the United States and Britain is part of the efforts to protect and create a perfect democracy which ensures a peaceful and secure environment for the populace. These vigilante groups collaborate with the State to provide services to the people in the areas of crime prevention and crime control, protecting local communities, and serving as alternative dispute resolution mechanism

In pre-colonial Africa, especially in South-Africa, Sierra-Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria, vigilantism found expression in the activities of secret societies, warrior bands, age grades and night guards which performed diverse functions of law enforcement, extra-judicial adjudication, external defense and peacemaking (Pratten, 2008). The phenomenon of vigilantism as citizen-led provision and governance of security is neither new in history across cultures (Killingray 1986; Abrahams 1987; Gore and Pratten 2003; Leach 2004; Fourchard 2008 cited in Zumve, et al 2020), nor is vigilante activities in modern times uniquely peculiar to African societies (Brownyn, 2001). Some dissimilarity can be drawn between these groups which were created by local communities for their own protection and the recently State evolved vigilante groups.

Nigerian pre-colonial societies depended solely on informal methods of crime control in combating crime and criminals. For example, Rotimi 1977; Tamuno 1970, Ahire 1991; and Dambazau 1994 cited in Anyo, et al 2020 posit that before the emergence of formal crime control structures in Nigeria, among the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa societies/nations, crime control was achieved using informal means such as, age grade system, secret societies, dogarai, and community watch groups that may be subsumed generally into vigilante groups in today's parlance. This was also true in Benue province where community watch groups such as "(Mbakwaw) age grade" and "(Mbayev Kyaior) youth" among the Tiv, and "(Olode) community policing group" among the Idoma were used as a means for both social and crime control before the advent of colonial rule. They policed community members' behaviour; imposed sanctions against those who violated the course for maintenance of law and order, defended their communities against external aggression,

performed peacemaking function, and control of crime. These pre-modern agencies of crime control were not accepted by the colonial administration, who described them as barbaric, archaic and uncivilized and hence they were abolished.

Communities have diverse reasons accounting for the resurgence of the activities of community watch groups (vigilante groups). In South Africa, vigilante activity was frequently justified as ‘filling a policing gap’ due to police inefficiency, corruption and conspiracy with criminals, practical failure in the criminal justice system. In Sierra-Leone, vigilante activities have been explained in terms of police ineffectiveness in combating crimes (Pratten & Sen, 2008). In Nigeria, Human Rights Watch and Center for Law Enforcement and Education report (2002) noted that vigilante groups and other self-defense groups currently operating in Nigeria have roots that reach deep into the country’s history. Vigilante groups are organized to ensure public safety because of police ineffectiveness. It is in this regard that various alternative means such as – Civilian Joint Task Force-(Yangoro) in Borno State (CJTF), ethnic militias, such as Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), “Amotekun” in Western Nigeria, Bakassi Boys and Egbesu Boys in Eastern Nigeria, Arewa Youth Vanguard for the Northern Nigeria, Hisba for Sharia practicing areas, Livestock Guards and Benue State Community Volunteer Guard in Benue State developed and are still being supported in many quarters. However, the operations of vigilante groups are characterized by a plethora of challenges.

**In specific, the following are the challenges of vigilante groups:**

**Inadequate funding**

The world over, all institutions performing such crucial functions for the society are supposed to be properly funded to live up to their expected goals. Most imperatively, for those ensuring the security and safety of lives and property of the society, funding should have been given priority. However, vigilante groups in Nigeria and Benue State in particular, are confronted with funding challenges which hamper their effectiveness and efficiency. Vigilante groups are largely funded by and through community efforts and individual monetary donations and contributions. The issues of lack of funding lead to vigilante groups’ unending yearnings for operational facilities such as touch lights, patrol vans, rain coats, and whistles (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

**The Use and Abuse of Arms**

The operations of vigilante groups that are armed and managed outside the purview of the State raise several concerns. Their existence in Benue State mirrors the failure of the State and the danger of a gradual drift towards State failure and collapse that may throw up warlords in different parts of the State. For instance, the arming of Benue Community Volunteer Guards is a pointer in this direction. The proliferation of arms in the society via vigilante groups’ activities in Benue State is a major breeder of conflict and violent crimes in general. The extent to which such groups contribute to the wide spread cases of ethnic, religious and communal violence needs to be investigated, because many well-known vigilante groups are primarily ethnic militia (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

**Human Rights Violation**

The operations of vigilante groups, stir concern regarding human rights protection, observance of the rule of law, and due process. Vigilante groups are criticized in the area of respect for suspects’ human rights in the course of investigation. There are numerous instances

where vigilante groups are challenged on the account of violation of inalienable rights of crime suspects. The nature of human rights violation by vigilante groups include, torture of crime suspects, neck lacing of suspects, hanging, use of tear gas, electrocution of suspects and the application of pepper on genital and other sensitive organs of crime suspect, such organs include, anus, eyes, penis, and vaginal. The issue of human right violation by the vigilante groups makes the people to decline their support to the operation of vigilante groups in their communities. A recurring feature among vigilance groups' method of handling cases is that of inflicting corporal punishment on suspects in the mistaken belief of administering justice (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

#### **Illegal Nature of Vigilante Groups:**

In Nigeria as it stands today, there is no existing law establishing, empowering, mandating, recognizing and defining vigilante groups' powers to function as crime control outfits. The challenge of lack of legal framework sometimes makes the police and the public to question of the legality of vigilante groups. Such attitude has de-motivated members of the organization thereby making them to be rated lowly in performance (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

#### **The Problem of Remuneration:**

Vigilante groups provide security services for the protection lives and property of members of the society. However, the individuals performing such functions are not well remunerated to boost their morale. The non-provision of token in form of remuneration for full time vigilante members pushes some of them to indulge in corrupt practices. Members of vigilante groups take to corrupt practices that are noticeable and prevalent in State or official security organizations. The nature and extent of corruption in vigilante groups in Nigeria in general and Benue State in particular, causes public distrust for the services they provide and gives them bad image before the public (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

#### **Lack of Facilities/Equipment:**

There is no institution or organization that functions, operates and performs maximally without the availability of the basic tools or facilities to enhance proficiency and efficiency. Vigilante groups are confronted with the challenge of lack of operational logistics and facilities to perform in Benue State. There is no crime fighting agency, or organization that operates effectively without improved crime fighting facilities. Vigilante groups lack such facilities as patrol vans, touch light, rain coat, whistles and stationeries. When institutions and organizations lack work tools, their performance is grossly affected (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

#### **Extra Judicial Killing:**

Extra judicial killing means killing of a human being not in accordance with the due process of law as determined by a competent judicial authority after regular trial in a court of law and subsequent determination of guilt for which death penalty is applied. Many vigilante groups have been accused of engagement in extra judicial killings, contrary to the intent and purpose of the services they are supposed to render (CLEEN; 2003, Chikwendu; 2016, Okeke, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted functionalism as its theoretical framework. Functionalism or structural functionalism as it is often called is rooted in the works of Spencer (1820-1903) and Durkheim (1858-1917). Functionalists view society as a system of highly interrelated structures and parts that function or operate together and harmoniously. Functionalists analyze the society by seeking to know what each component part of the society contributes to the smooth functioning of the whole ‘society’. The core argument of functionalism is that there is a consensus of core values within a society which corresponds to the needs of its members. Society is viewed as a functioning entity comprising of many parts each of which interrelates with and supports the others (Haralambos & Robini, 1980). Therefore, to understand any part of the society is to analyze its relationship with other parts and essentially its contribution to the maintenance of the society.

For the functionalists, social control is a basic human need and one of the salient prerequisites behind the existence of the State, government and even society. Therefore, the activities of vigilante groups as crime control outfit are indispensable in the society given their contribution to crime control in the society without which the nature of social disorder would have aggravated. For the functionalists, the basic needs or those necessary conditions of existence of society are referred to as the functional prerequisites of society. Several approaches have been used to identify what these functional prerequisites of societies are. The assumption here is that the existing institutional arrangements such as crime control agencies meet the needs that are common to all societies. The functional prerequisites here are; the need to devise a suitable mechanism (crime control strategies) to ensure that crime is adequately and appropriately controlled by motivated persons-vigilantes.

The concept of “function” in the functionalists’ analysis refers to “the contribution of the part to the whole”. Social control mechanisms ensure for the attainment of social order through the regulation of human conduct. As long as crime control agencies perform their roles adequately, they remain functional. However, their ineffectiveness and inefficiency in attaining the expected roles of maintaining the society in a cohesive and harmonious state would make them dysfunctional. Therefore, the challenges confronting vigilante groups have rendered them ineffective and inefficient in crime control making them dysfunctional. Suffice is to say that, the challenges of vigilante groups makes the people disenchanted with their activities. This aligns the dysfunctional postulation of structural functionalists. Therefore, the challenges of vigilante groups such as inadequate/poor logistics, inadequate funding, abuse of human rights, inadequate basic training challenge, non-existence of legal instrument establishing vigilante groups, corruption and vested interest have amounted to the rating of vigilante groups as a dysfunctional crime control strategies.

The major strength of the functionalist perspective in explaining the challenges confronting vigilante groups in effective crime control in Benue State is that; it attempts to account for the interrelatedness of all the components that make up the social system or society towards the attainment of social equilibrium. The dysfunctional postulation of the functionalist theory is apt in explaining why the activities of vigilante groups are marred by challenges that made same ineffective in crime control in Benue State.

### **Methodology**

Benue State was adopted as the setting for this paper. Three Local Government Areas were selected across the three Senatorial districts in Benue State. These selected Local Government Areas were, Katsina-Ala, Makurdi, and Otukpo. The Local Governments Areas were selected to

draw a balanced representation across the senatorial districts in Benue State. The setting was adopted because of the prevalence of the activities of vigilante groups in the locality. The study adopted cross-sectional research design. This type of research gathers data from a large number of subjects. The purpose was to gather information from a representative sample of the population from which generalization can be made to the entire population. Survey design describes and interprets what exists at present.

The research population for the study consisted members of the public, traditional rulers, religious leaders, police officers and leaders and members of Vigilante groups within Benue State. The selected population of the study was considered as stakeholders in the activities of vigilante groups in their various communities. Data from the Independent Electoral Commission (2019), put the population of the selected Local Government Areas that were between 18 years and above for Katsina-Ala at 149,397, Makurdi, 272,678 and Oturkpo, 130,199, respectively. This made a total population of 552,274 persons. Four hundred (400) respondents were selected using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula.

Simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed for the selection of respondents. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting one (1) Local Government Area from each of the senatorial zones making a total of three (3) Local Government Councils. The study adopted simple random sampling in selecting the respondents. Compounds were selected randomly from each of the sampled areas from which respondents chosen. To achieve this, a balloting system was adopted where codes “Yes” and “No” were inscribed on separate pieces of papers. These were folded and presented in twos to each prospective respondent. Those that chose the acceptable code (Yes) were allowed to participate in the study.

Questionnaire and in-depth interview (IDI) were used to generate data. Consequently, four (4) in-depth interviews sessions were conducted from each of the selected three (3) sampled areas. This brought the total number of in-depth interviews to twelve (12). Two (2) research assistants were hired and trained to help the researcher collect data in Zones, A, and C. The research assistants were University graduates. Each of the research assistants covered the number of Local Government Areas sampled in their respective senatorial districts as assigned to them while Makurdi Local Government Areas was covered by the lead researcher. Quantitative data were presented in frequency and simple percentages while qualitative data were presented in narrative form.

**Table 1. Selected Local Government Areas sampled for the Study**

LGA	Sample Population	Sample Size	Percentage of Sample Population
Katsina-Ala	149,397	176	44%
Makurdi	272,678	134	33.5%
Oturkpo	130,199	90	22.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>552, 274</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (2019)**

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section deals with data presentation and analysis on the challenges confronting vigilante groups in Benue State. The following were the identified challenges of vigilante groups: lack of basic crime fighting equipment, vigilante were not statutorily recognized agency, funding challenges, abuse of the fundamental rights of suspects, inadequate basic security training, logistics challenges.



**Table 2: Challenges confronting vigilante groups in Benue State**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lack of basic crime fighting equipment	60	16.4
Vigilante are not statutorily established	73	19.8
Inadequate funding	66	17.9
Abuse of the fundamental rights of suspects	61	16.6
Inadequate basic training as security personnel	56	15.3
Logistic challenges	51	13.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022.**

Data in table 1 revealed that 16.3% (60) identified lack of basic crime fighting equipment, 19.8% (73) indicated that vigilante groups were not statutorily established and recognized crime control agency, 17.9%(66) cited inadequate funding, while 16.6%(61), noted abuse of the fundamental rights of suspects. A total of 15.3% (56) identified lack of basic training and 13.8% (51) cited shortage of logistics as the challenges of vigilante groups in Benue State.

The qualitative data on the challenges of vigilante converged with the quantitative data on lack of basic crime fighting equipment as one of the major challenges of vigilante groups in Benue State. For instance, a key informant noted that:

I have observed that vigilante groups in this area lack basic equipment to facilitate their fight against crime. Vigilante groups have depended on bows and arrows, cutlass, catapults, Dane guns, batons as their basic crime fighting equipment. Moreover, this equipment was not available for vigilantes. The activities of vigilante groups were negatively affected by the deficit in crime fighting equipment that befall them (KII, 18<sup>th</sup> July, Male, Traditional Ruler, Aged 65, Katsina-Ala, 2022).

Data established that vigilante groups as a community-evolved crime control agency were unable to acquire crime fighting equipment to facilitate their operations in a manner that they can neutralize armed Fulani Militia who terrorise Benue communities. This finding corroborated the findings of (Justice for All Group, 2012; and Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003) which stated that vigilante groups lack basic crime fighting equipment to facilitate their operations.

The opinions of the interviewees cohere with respondents' opinion on lack of statutory provisions as a challenge of vigilante groups in Benue State as shown in table two above. An informant stated that:

People in our locality have described vigilante as illegal organisation because there were no extant laws that legalised and recognised the activities of vigilante groups in our area. Because of the non-availability of legal framework that established and recognised the activities of vigilante groups in the area, residents have disregarded and ignored their invitation most times; some queried their stop and check activities, and have had contestations with vigilantes in the area (KII, 17<sup>th</sup> July, Male, Vigilante Officer, Aged 51, Makurdi LGA, 2022).

Findings indicated that the constitutional provision for the establishment of security outfits was within the exclusive list of legislation which deprived the State governments in Nigeria the right to legislate on the establishment of security agencies. Data revealed that because vigilante

groups were informal crime control mechanisms, they had challenges of operating within the ambit of the law. This finding corroborated the findings of (Obeagu, 2014, Ekeh, 2003) which established that some Nigerian communities have resorted to unregulated and violent reprisal against suspected sources of their collective endangerment.

Data identified inadequate funding as another (14.2%) challenge that confronted vigilante groups in Benue State. According to the data, funding challenge meant near absence of finance to support the activities of vigilante groups. Data revealed that vigilante groups being community evolved structure of crime control, they were funded by the community and they never received State grants hence they have funding challenges. Data indicated that because of the funding challenge that surrounded vigilante groups, they were not a salaried crime control mechanism. Data proved that the host community and the State to some extent made financial interventions that enabled the payment of vigilantes monthly stipend which was not enough compared to what employees of formal crime control agencies earn and in relation to the prevailing economic realities in Nigeria. A key informant noted that:

Vigilante groups have serious funding challenge in this locality. We have been providing crime control services here without any reasonable funding by our host community, the State Government and Local Government Council. The challenge of remuneration has dampened the morale of most of our members in the locality. The funding challenge of vigilante groups has caused lack of basic equipment to facilitate our fight against crime (KII, 27<sup>th</sup> July, Female, Vigilante Officer, Aged 46, Oturkpo LGA, 2022).

Available data revealed that vigilante groups needed operational logistics and equipment was not procured because of the funding challenges that characterized the operations of vigilante groups. Therefore, vigilante groups lack bows and arrows, batons, cutlass, sword, axes, spears, catapult and dane guns, patrol vans, torch lights, batteries, whistles, raincoats, boots and uniforms. The findings further established that vigilante groups sustained their operations in view of funding via different means and sources such as community sponsorship, case registration fees and inconsistent grants from the State and Local Governments. Also, finding show that individuals' resident in the communities where vigilante groups operated were major stakeholders in the sponsorship of the activities vigilante because they were the direct beneficiaries of vigilante groups' services. According to the finding this justified why vigilante solicits for alms from households, traders, and passersby while on surveillance patrol and street barricade for the purchase of operational tools like torchlight, rain coat, and batteries for the torchlight. This finding corroborated the findings of (Onwuegbusi, 2017; Justice for All Group, 2012; and Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003).

Data revealed that vigilante groups violated and abused the fundamental human rights (13.9%) of the people. According to the data, abuse of fundamental human rights meant the violation of human dignity of suspected criminals by vigilantes. The respondents said that the subjection of crime suspects to dehumanizing treatment such as torture and deprivation of their right to fair hearing and trial amounted to abuse of their fundamental rights. The findings of the informants corroborated with the findings of respondents on the violation of fundamental rights of crime suspects as a challenge of vigilante groups in Benue State. For instance, the views of an informant indicated that:

Vigilantes have no regards for the fundamental rights of crime suspects in our locality. Vigilante groups were noted to have tortured crime suspects in the course of arrest and investigation. Such activities that amounted to torture of suspects by

vigilantes include hanging of suspects, burning of suspects nails on fire, application of pepper on suspected criminals' sensitive organs such as eyes, anus, penis, vagina and ears, canning of suspects palms, head pinning of suspects, and kneeling of suspected criminals under the sun. This and many other extrajudicial practices were typical of vigilante within our locality (KII, 27<sup>th</sup> July, Male, Religious Leader, Aged 67, 2022).

Findings established that dehumanizing practices were deployed by vigilante groups to inflict psychological and physical pain on suspects to facilitate admissibility of their involvement in crime. Findings revealed that the methods employed by vigilante groups in dealing with crime suspects were against the United Nations extant laws that provides for the safeguard of human rights. Such was against the basic tenet of democracy that advocated for the safeguard of human rights. The above finding corroborated the findings of (Knowland, 2014; Onwuegbusi, 2017; Chikwendu, 2016; Okeke, 2013, Umeagbalasi, 2012, Amnesty International Worldwide, 2013, Justice for All Group, 2012; Alemika et al, 2003; and CLEEN, 2003) which diversely established that vigilante groups have violated and abused the fundamental rights of the people.

Data established that vigilantes lack basic security training (12.5%) for enhanced operations. According to the data, training meant availing a detailed orientation and refresher courses on basic security practice and operational tactics for the vigilantes for enhanced maximum operations. Data indicated that such training covered crime profiling, crime investigation technique, beat operation technique, fire arms usage, self-defense, and human rights safeguard. The data revealed that absence of these training hampered the effective and efficient operations of vigilante groups. The findings of the respondents corroborated with informants on lack of basic security training as a challenge of vigilante groups in Benue State. For example, a key informant noted that:

A noticeable challenge of vigilante groups in our area was lack of basic training among vigilantes. The manifest consequences of lack of basic training among vigilantes was the violation of the fundamental rights of residents in our locality, poor knowledge on crime profiling, lack of understanding on interrogation and investigation of suspects, poor intelligence gathering and surveillance skills (KII, 6<sup>th</sup> July, Male, Traditional Ruler, Aged 61, Oturkpo LGA, 2022).

Findings revealed that vigilante groups had not received basic security training for enhanced effective operations. Data noted that security agencies both formal and informal needed basic training for enhanced performance. The data established that the importance of basic security training was to equip security operatives with the needed expertise to cope with the emerging trends in criminality by evolving suitable strategies to checkmate crime. Data indicated that vigilante groups being informal crime control mechanisms had training deficit because their host communities lack the funds to hire professional security agencies to train vigilantes. Data show that vigilantes were not trained on how to use Dane gun which to some extent made them to have accidental discharge. Data further established that vigilante groups were not given the basic training on what amounted to the rights of crime suspects and what constituted violation of the human rights of suspected criminals and how such rights shall and must be safeguarded by security operatives. The above finding corroborated the findings of (Chikwendu, 2016; Okeke, 2013, Amnesty International Worldwide, 2013, Justice for All Group, 2012 and CLEEN, 2003) which established that vigilante groups needed technical support and relevant training intervention that will improve them in tackling the trend and sophistication of criminality and fundamental human rights safeguard.

Data further indicated that vigilante groups have logistics challenges (10.6%) in Benue State. According to the data, logistics meant the needed operational facilities to facilitate the activities of vigilante groups in Benue State. The data indicated that the needed materials meant to facilitate the operations of vigilante groups were unavailable in the area. Data revealed the logistics that were lacking by vigilante groups include patrol vans, motorcycles to access the remote localities that were motorable, uniforms, raincoat, boots, whistles, torch lights walkie-talkies and batteries. The above findings corroborated the views of key informants on logistics challenges that characterise the activities of vigilante groups in Benue State. For example, an informant mentioned thus:

Vigilante groups have logistics challenge which has hampered their effective and efficient operations. Such logistics vigilante groups lack in our area were patrol vans or vehicles and motorcycles that were needed to facilitate their operations across the length and breadth of our area, torch lights to flash dark spots while on night patrol, raincoats and boots to enable them operate in the rain, whistles to communicate security threats to officers and residents and lack of means of identification such as uniforms and identity cards (KII, 6<sup>th</sup> July, Male, Religious Leader, Aged 49, Katsina-Ala, 2022).

Findings indicated that unavailability of logistics such as patrol vans and motorcycles hindered vigilantes' swift response to distress security calls in the locality. Findings revealed further that lack of uniforms made the identification of vigilantes difficult. Without such means of identification, criminals have infiltrated the operations of vigilante groups in Benue State. Findings established that lack of raincoat and boots stopped vigilantes from operating under the rain which allowed criminals to operate freely during the raining season; boots were needed for the protection of the feet of vigilantes against environmental hazards; lack of whistles, torch lights and batteries hindered vigilantes from illuminating dark spots and alerting officers and residents on security threats. Data indicated that no security agency functions efficiently and effectively without logistics hence the underperformance of vigilante groups in the locality was tied to logistics challenges. This finding corroborated the findings of (Knowland, 2014; Onwuegbusi, 2017; Chikwendu, 2016; Okeke, 2013, Umeagbalasi, 2012, Amnesty International Worldwide, 2013, Justice for All Group, 2012; Alemika and Chukwuma, 2003; and CLEEN, 2003) which variously revealed that vigilante groups have logistics challenges.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the challenges confronting vigilante groups in Benue State, Nigeria. The study drew its strength and findings from data obtained from three Local Government Areas of the state, namely Katsina-Ala, Makurdi, and Otukpo, respectively which constituted the focus of the research. The study discovered that vigilante groups in the study area were encumbered with operational and administrative challenges. The identified challenges included lack of basic crime fighting equipment, absence of legal backing, inadequate funding and lack of basic security training among others.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends the following towards repositioning the activities of vigilante groups in Benue State, Nigeria:

- (a) Enactment of laws recognizing vigilante groups as a crime control agency. The National and State Assemblies across Nigeria and in particular, the Benue State house of Assembly,

should enact laws that give legal backing for the existence and operation of vigilante groups.

- (b) Vigilante groups should be provided with the needed crime fighting equipment and other logistic support by the State and Local Governments, host communities, and non-governmental organizations to enhance their performance.
- (c) Adequate funding of vigilante groups by relevant stakeholders will go a long way in guaranteeing their performance and in the end, result in efficient service delivery.
- (d) Vigilante groups should demonstrate adequate respect for the rights of suspects instead of being law breakers or promoters of lawlessness and disorder in the society as it is the case in Benue State.
- (e) Vigilantes should be properly trained in order to meet the professional standard needed to operate in a democratic environment such as Nigeria.

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