

How to guide 13:

Coordination Between the Nigerian Police Force
and the Voluntary Policing Sector

What is the J4A ‘How to’ series?

The guide is part of a series of products developed by J4A to communicate lessons learned from projects and pilots, to provide stakeholders with guidance on how to adapt and replicate the initiative in their own context.

Who is this ‘How to’ guide for?

Influencers and decision makers in the justice sector (police, prisons, judiciary and civil society).

Reference tools

Accompanying reference tools are available at www.j4a-nigeria.org or by request from info@j4a-nigeria.org

The problem

- There is often a polarised relationship between the **Nigeria Police Force** (NPF) and the **Voluntary Policing Sector** (VPS). Many VPS groups operate completely autonomously from the police and often take the law into their hands. The police appear to be seen in the community only when absolutely necessary (during a raid or when they want to effect an arrest).
- There is currently ineffective coordination with the police: Most VPS group and their local police have an understanding of the need to work together with the community to prevent crime and ensure improved community safety but lack the knowledge and required skills for community policing. This is combined with a lack of a framework to coordinate activities and share information.
- There is a lack of trust between the police and the VPS and by extension members of the community.
- No structured processes for the coordination of NPF/VPS activities in the community.
- Illegal use of force and firearms by VPS groups.
- VPS groups assuming the role of police in the community.
- Competition for relevance in the community by different VPS groups.
- Most VPS groups do not have a structured guideline of operation nor administrative procedure in terms of recruitment, organisation and management.

Background

The pivotal role that VPS groups play in addressing the safety and security needs of poor communities is well documented and for many Nigerians, especially the poor, VPS groups are pre-eminent and in some cases the only groups they feel able to go to for their safety and security needs.

Bearing in mind the reliance of many citizens especially the poor on the VPS for their daily safety and security needs, the shortcomings of VPS groups need to be taken into consideration, and their capacity developed. As stated in the problem, many VPS groups operate completely autonomously from the police, only engaging with them only when absolutely necessary (e.g. to hand over a suspect which in some cases they have tortured and wounded); and without any understanding of how the NPF and VPS groups can work together with the community to deliver improved community safety. This is often a result of the mutual lack of trust and suspicion both groups have for each other.

The **NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting** is designed to promote joint community policing between the NPF and the VPS to help prevent and respond to crime; bring the activities of the sector under the oversight of the formal policing sector for greater efficiency; and by so doing improve the working relationship between the two groups to the benefit of the community they serve.

The VPS and NPF working closely in a coordinated manner have the potential of making a significant impact on levels of crime and citizens' fear of crime.

Improvements

- Crime prevention through visible patrols in communities with or without the NPF and providing family/ community safety tips and advice.
- Immediate post-crime/conflict support, providing urgent help to victims, calling police/emergency services, protecting crime scenes and in some circumstances, apprehending suspects
- Supporting and coordinating effectively with community safety partnerships and safety and security initiatives of the NPF, local communities, civil society organisations (CSOs) and local and state government authorities, etc. to improve community safety and security
- Functions of NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting.
- Improves police engagement with local communities.
- Improves community knowledge of the police "(Know your police)"
- Communicating early warning signs of threats and planning early intervention.
- Security brief and measures by the DPO.

What you can do

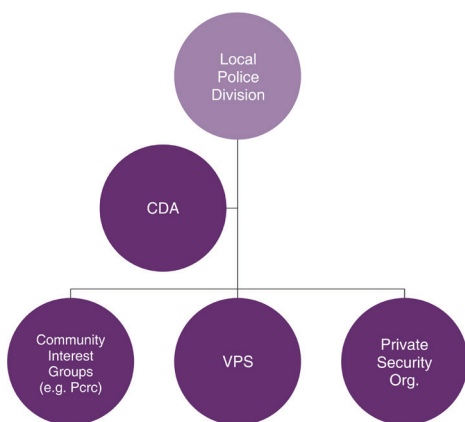
State Commissioner of Police
Commissioner in Charge of a VPS
Related Ministry
Divisional Police Officer
Local Government Chairman

Introduce an NPF/VPS Coordinating Meeting in your state/division/community to ensure that there is a good working relationship between your local police and the VPS groups in operation. The NPF/VPS Coordinating Meeting is a small meeting between the Neighbourhood Policing Team or with the Community Policing Managers of a division and the executives of the VPS groups in the community. The meeting is hosted monthly by the DPO at the division.

What you can achieve

- Reduction in crime and community concerns.
- Increased mutual trust between the police and VPS.
- Early detection of safety and security issues in the community.
- Improved relationship between the police/VPS and members of the community.
- Police oversight of VPS activities in communities.
- Joint problem solving approach to safety and security issues.

VPS/NPF Coordination Meeting Structure



Key Principles

- Leadership of the Police and VPS.
- Very good knowledge of the community and local language.
- Respect for human rights including the rights of women and children.
- Embracing democratic values.
- Joint local policing plan.
- Intelligence led policing.
- Joint or collaborative problem solving.
- The slogan **“See something, say something”**.
- Inclusive, transparent and accountable process of responding to community issues.
- Mutuality of goals and commitment in promoting community peace and security.

A successful NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting will ensure visible community policing by both groups and send out the message that there is no hiding place for criminals in the community. It increases community trust in the police and leads to a huge reduction in the likelihood of community members being caught up in crime, either as victims or even as perpetrators.

NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting: Steps for Implementation

1. Advocacy meetings with the leadership of the police (Commissioner of Police, Divisional Police Officer) and VPS (Ministry, Local Government, VPS leaders) to sensitise them on need to set up the NPF/VPS coordinating meeting, its goals and objectives.
2. Pre-inaugural meeting to discuss modalities – frequency of meeting, venue, time, agenda, participants, and financial support for logistics (e.g. stationary, refreshments, etc.). Agenda examples available in the reference tools.
3. Design of a reporting format to be used to report on activities by both police and VPS. Report should answer the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - Where did it happen?
 - When did it happen?
 - Who were the people involved?
 - Why did it happen?
4. Inauguration of the exclusive coordinating meeting. It is only meant for the neighbourhood Policing Team Officers/Community Policing Managers of the division and the executives of the VPS. The objectives of the NPF/VPS Coordinating Meeting are read out at the inauguration.
5. Inauguration is at the police division, which will also host the meetings. The chairperson of the meeting is the DPO or his representative (the head NPT or Community Policing Manager).
6. For purposes of balancing and true representation, the secretary of the meeting is a VPS person, who must be literate enough to take notes and read minutes.
7. Organising and facilitating NPF/VPS Coordinating meetings monthly.

Coordinating the NPF/VPS Meeting: The Chairman & Secretary

NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting is an internal security meeting between the police and VPS leaders and as such Invitation to meetings is selective and not open to the general public or all VPS members. The Chairman is usually the Divisional Police Officer of the host Division or their nominee such as the NPF Community Policing manager while the secretary will be a VPS official.

Key Roles

- To ensure the success and optimal productivity of the coordinating meeting, the Chairman must create and sustain an environment of openness and trust where differences of opinion are respected and everyone feels safe to speak.
- Promoting a highly participatory meeting with dynamic exchanges where everyone has a chance to speak; and there is tolerance for divergent viewpoints.
- Support active listening, where people try to understand each other rather than to promote a point of view. As much as possible manage arguments especially unproductive arguments.
- Having the contact list of every important government agency, traditional ruler, DPOs etc. Conscious effort must be taken to update the contact list regularly.
- Being open and accessible at all times; friendly to all (not to particular person) and disciplined. As much as possible avoid impressing their personal opinion at meetings. They may suggest possible solutions but let the audience decide what they want to do.
- Every member of NPF/VPS Coordinating meeting must be treated equally.
- Ensure that complaints/issues raised at meetings are well documented and followed up upon.
- Updates and reports are given on issues raised at the last meeting.
- Feedback on issues resolved and how they were resolved.

Cost Implications

Setting up and organising the NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting has very little cost implications. The meeting is held at the police division and as such no cost for venue. Some little funding or donation would help in the area of stationary (e.g. for printing agenda, taking notes, making photocopies). The same also applies if it is agreed that some light refreshments should be served at the meetings.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1:

Selective invitation to VPS leaders is more productive and safer than general invitation to VPS members.

Lesson 2:

It is important that the meeting is held monthly and at a fixed day/time in the month, is agreed upon so that community members all know and don't need to be reminded.

Lesson 3:

Complaints/problems raised (including complaints against the police) at a meeting must be followed up and feed back given at the next meeting in other not to make community members feel laying the complaint was useless as nothing was done.

Lesson 4:

The NPF must deal proactively with community concerns and the VPS must recognise police primacy.

Lesson 5:

Information sharing (including security brief by the DPO) at the coordination meeting goes a long way in early detection of planned criminal activities before they are carried out.

Lesson 6:

Joint problem solving at the coordination meeting increases trusts, minimises rumours and helps in peaceful resolution of safety and security issues in the community.

Lesson 7:

What seemed impossible suddenly becomes achievable because like minds are able to converge and exchange ideas.



Improvements

The NPF/VPS Coordination Meeting greatly improves the trust level between members of the community, the VPS and the police. Information and intelligence between NPF and VPS improves. Joint planning and operations can be undertaken.

Evaluation

A number of tools have been introduced to assist the NPF to evaluate success, including household surveys to ascertain public satisfaction and exit surveys for those citizens who have cause to come to the police station.

The standard of coordination is best assessed by observing the monthly meetings. The views of the key players such as the DPO, the Community Policing Manager and the VPS Chairs are crucial.

Contact

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+234 (0) 709 812 1548-9
info@j4a-nigeria.org
www.j4a-nigeria.org

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