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**Forest Guards and Community Policing in Nigeria: Strategies to Combat
Insecurity**

BY

ERU, EKA JOHN

HEAD OF UNIT

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Email: info@naltf.gov.ng

Abstract

Nigeria's escalating insecurity crisis continues to undermine state authority, socio-economic growth, and community resilience. Conventional responses led by the military and federal police have struggled to address the localized and multi-dimensional nature of violence, particularly in forested and rural areas. This research investigates the potential of Forest Guards and community policing as sustainable approaches to mitigating insecurity in Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), and reports from civil society organizations with qualitative insights from selected state-level case studies, the paper evaluates the effectiveness of community-driven security mechanisms. Findings indicate that between 2019 and 2024, Nigeria experienced a 45% increase in kidnapping incidents, with ungoverned forest spaces serving as operational bases for armed groups. Forest-related conflicts, including farmer–herder clashes, accounted for more than 8,000 deaths within the same period. Community policing initiatives in states such as Lagos, Kano, and Enugu demonstrated a reduction in urban crime rates of up to 20%, while reactivated Forest Guard units in Ondo and Ekiti disrupted forest-based criminal networks. Despite these successes, challenges such as weak coordination, underfunding, and political interference limit effectiveness. The study concludes that Forest Guards and community policing can complement national security agencies by providing grassroots intelligence, localized enforcement, and trust-building with communities. Policy recommendations emphasize the need for a clear legal framework, adequate funding, integration with existing security institutions, and depoliticization of recruitment processes. Strengthening these community-based strategies could contribute significantly to reducing insecurity and advancing sustainable development in Nigeria.

Introduction

Background to Nigeria's Insecurity Crisis

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has faced persistent and multidimensional security challenges since its independence in 1960. While early post-independence conflicts were largely political and regional, the past two decades have witnessed a complex transformation of insecurity into highly organized and violent forms. Today, Nigeria contends with terrorism in the North-East, banditry and mass kidnappings in the North-West, farmer–herder conflicts and communal violence in the Middle Belt, militancy and oil theft in the Niger Delta, and separatist agitations in the South-East. These overlapping crises have eroded public trust in the state, weakened national cohesion, and obstructed socio-economic development (Akinola, 2020).

Traditional responses have relied heavily on military operations and the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), often with limited success. Although the Nigerian Armed Forces launched counter-insurgency operations such as *Operation Lafiya Dole* in the North-East and *Operation Hadarin Daji* in the North-West, statistics indicate that civilian casualties and insecurity levels remain persistently high. The Nigeria Security Tracker (NST, 2024) reports over 70,000 conflict-related **deaths** between 2015 and 2023. Furthermore, insecurity has displaced more than 3.2 million **Nigerians**, creating a humanitarian burden (UNHCR, 2023). These figures highlight the limits of conventional top-down security measures in addressing Nigeria's deeply localized security problems.

Forested Areas as Insecurity Hotspots

Forested areas have emerged as a central component of Nigeria's security crisis. Thick forests across Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Benue, Ondo, and Cross River provide operational bases and hideouts for bandits, kidnappers, and insurgents. According to SBM Intelligence (2023), over 65% of reported mass kidnappings between 2019 and 2024 occurred in or near forested areas. Similarly, resource-based violence, particularly farmer–herder conflicts, is linked to competition over land and forest resources. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022) also warns that illegal logging and deforestation in Nigeria's forests not only degrade ecosystems but also fund criminal networks. These realities underscore the need for specialized security structures, such as Forest Guards, capable of operating in forest terrains while protecting both communities and natural resources.

Community Policing as a Complementary Strategy

Parallel to forest insecurity, urban and semi-urban areas face escalating threats from cult violence, petty crime, and organized gangs. Community policing has been promoted globally as a strategy for bridging the gap between citizens and law enforcement. The model emphasizes proactive engagement, local intelligence gathering, partnership with traditional institutions, and shared responsibility for safety. In Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force launched the Community Policing Initiative in 2004, with later pilot projects supported by organizations such as the CLEEN Foundation. States such as Lagos, Enugu, and Kano have since experimented with localized policing models, yielding promising results in crime prevention and enhanced reporting (Ekwueme & Eze, 2021).

Despite these successes, institutional weaknesses have hindered full-scale implementation. Poor funding, lack of trust between citizens and police, and overlapping jurisdiction with vigilante groups have limited impact. Nonetheless, community policing remains one of the most practical frameworks for addressing Nigeria's security crisis, particularly when combined with other grassroots-based approaches such as Forest Guards.

Rationale for Studying Forest Guards and Community Policing

The combined role of Forest Guards and community policing has received growing attention in Nigerian policy circles but remains under-researched in academic literature. While several studies have examined counter-terrorism and military interventions, limited work has been dedicated to localized security architectures. Given the centrality of forests in Nigeria's insecurity landscape and the necessity of community trust for sustainable policing, this research seeks to fill that gap. It explores how strengthening Forest Guards and institutionalizing community policing can create a dual strategy for both rural and urban security.

By analyzing statistical data, reviewing policy initiatives, and evaluating case studies from Ondo, Zamfara, Kaduna, and Enugu, this study aims to demonstrate that localized, people-centered approaches offer a more sustainable pathway to securing Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria has been widely conceptualized as a product of weak governance, poverty, unemployment, ethno-religious divisions, and porous borders (Akinola, 2020; Omotola, 2021). However, recent studies emphasize the spatial dynamics of insecurity, particularly the role of forests as ungoverned spaces where criminal groups operate (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2021). The inability of the Nigerian state to extend effective policing and surveillance to forest and rural areas has provided opportunities for armed groups, bandits, and kidnappers. This context has revived debates on localized and community-based approaches to security provision.

Forest Guards in Historical and Contemporary Context

The idea of Forest Guards in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era, when guards were primarily tasked with the protection of forest reserves and wildlife (Okeke, 2019). Their roles were more environmental than security-related. However, in recent years, the increasing use of forests as operational bases for criminal groups has led state governments to revive Forest Guard structures. For instance, Ondo State reintroduced Forest Guards in 2019 under Governor Rotimi Akeredolu to combat kidnappings and illegal logging (Punch, 2019). Similarly, Ekiti and Ebonyi States have attempted to integrate Forest Guards into their local security architecture.

Empirical studies show mixed results. On the one hand, Forest Guards in Ondo State were instrumental in detecting criminal hideouts and assisting security agencies in raids (Afolabi, 2022). On the other hand, weak training, poor remuneration, and a lack of coordination with federal security forces limited their effectiveness. Nonetheless, scholars argue that Forest Guards remain an untapped resource in addressing forest-related insecurity, particularly if their roles are formalized and adequately funded (Ojo & Olayemi, 2023).

Community Policing in Nigeria

Community policing, as a philosophy, emphasizes collaboration between police and communities to identify and solve local security problems. Globally, it has been associated with reduced crime rates, improved public trust, and stronger information-sharing networks (Bayley, 2006). In Nigeria, community policing was first piloted in 2004, with support from the CLEEN Foundation and the British Council's Security, Justice, and Growth Programme. These pilots, conducted in Enugu, Kano, and Lagos, demonstrated that community-driven policing could improve intelligence gathering and reduce petty crimes (Ekwueme & Eze, 2021).

However, nationwide adoption has been inconsistent. Structural challenges such as corruption in the police, lack of accountability, and inadequate resources have undermined sustainability. The Nigeria Police Force's 2020 attempt to recruit 10,000 community policing constables was criticized for a lack of transparency and for being politically influenced (Amadi, 2021). Despite these setbacks, evidence suggests that states with strong community policing frameworks record **higher crime reporting rates** and better integration of vigilante groups (CLEEN Foundation, 2022).

Comparative Perspectives

Scholarly insights from other contexts enrich understanding of Nigeria's situation. In Kenya, community policing through the "Nyumba Kumi" initiative has been central to countering terrorism and urban insecurity (Ruteere, 2016). In India, Forest Guards play a dual role in both conservation and anti-insurgency efforts, particularly in Naxalite-influenced areas (Sharma, 2019). South Africa provides another model where community policing forums legally integrate local communities into policing processes, though challenges of trust and inequality persist (Faull, 2017). These international experiences demonstrate that while community policing and

Forest Guards can improve security, success depends on institutional reforms, sustainable funding, and strong oversight.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study draws on two key theories:

1. **Human Security Theory** – emphasizes that security should not be limited to the state but must also protect individuals from threats such as violence, poverty, and environmental degradation (UNDP, 1994). Forest Guards and community policing align with this approach by prioritizing community safety and environmental protection.
2. **Social Contract Theory** – posits that governments exist to protect citizens in exchange for legitimacy (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau). Nigeria's insecurity crisis reveals a broken contract, where citizens turn to self-help security groups. Strengthening Forest Guards and community policing can restore elements of this social contract.

Gaps in Literature

Although much has been written on Boko Haram, banditry, and farmer–herder conflicts, fewer studies have systematically examined the synergy between Forest Guards and community **policing** in Nigeria. Most research treats them in isolation, with Forest Guards studied within forestry/environmental literature and community policing within law enforcement discourse. This study contributes by analyzing both strategies together, assessing their combined potential for addressing insecurity in rural and urban Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture the complexity of insecurity in Nigeria and the role of Forest Guards and community policing in addressing it. Quantitative data were used to analyze trends in crime, kidnapping, banditry, and farmer–herder conflicts, while qualitative data provided insights into community perceptions, government policies, and state-level initiatives.

Data Sources

1. **Primary Data (Secondary Analysis of Published Surveys)**
 - Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on crime trends, unemployment, and poverty indicators.
 - Data from the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) (2015–2024), which records conflict-related deaths, kidnappings, and violent incidents.

- State government reports, particularly from Ondo, Zamfara, Kaduna, and Enugu, on Forest Guard and community policing initiatives.
 - Security-focused civil society organizations (e.g., CLEEN Foundation, SBM Intelligence, International Crisis Group).
- 2. Secondary Literature**
- Academic journals, books, and policy briefs addressing insecurity, community policing, and forest governance in Nigeria and comparable contexts.
 - International sources (e.g., UNODC, ISS Africa) to provide comparative perspectives.
- 3. Case Studies**
- Zamfara (North-West): epicenter of banditry and kidnapping-for-ransom.
 - Kaduna (North-West/Middle Belt): forest-based insurgent hideouts and farmer–herder conflicts.
 - Ondo (South-West): state-led Forest Guard revival initiative.
 - Enugu (South-East): community policing pilot and citizen-driven security partnerships.

Analytical Framework

The study employs descriptive statistical analysis to present trends in crime and insecurity, complemented by a qualitative thematic analysis of policy documents, reports, and interviews available in the published literature. The framework focuses on identifying:

- Trends in insecurity (2015–2024).
- The relationship between forested areas and insecurity.
- The impact of community policing on crime reduction.
- Policy strengths and gaps in the institutionalization of Forest Guards.

Table 1. Key Variables and Indicators

Variable	Indicator	Source
Kidnapping incidents	Annual number of kidnappings by region (2015–2024)	Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), SBM Intel
Banditry-related deaths	Fatalities linked to banditry (2015–2024)	NST, NBS
Farmer–herder conflicts	Number of deaths/injuries in conflict-prone areas	NST, FAO, CLEEN Foundation
Forest-related crimes	Illegal logging cases, forest-based kidnappings	State Gov. reports, FAO
Community policing outcomes	Reported crime reduction rates, citizen trust surveys	CLEEN Foundation, NPF, NBS
Forest Guard activities	Number of patrols, arrests,	Ondo, Ekiti, and Ebonyi State

	and rescued victims	reports
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Source: NBS, 2023

Limitations

- Lack of centralized, transparent security data in Nigeria results in reliance on multiple sources, which may report varying figures.
- State-level reports are not always updated regularly, creating gaps in recent years.
- Community perception data are limited, requiring reliance on published surveys rather than primary fieldwork.

Results and Data
Trends in Kidnapping (2015–2024)

Kidnapping for ransom has become one of the fastest-growing crimes in Nigeria, especially in forested regions of the North-West and South-West. Data from the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) and SBM Intelligence show a consistent upward trend.

Table 1: Reported Kidnapping Cases in Nigeria (2015–2024)

Year	Reported Cases	Estimated Victims	Notable Hotspots (States)
2015	400	~900	Kaduna, Zamfara, Rivers
2017	630	~1,450	Zamfara, Katsina, Delta
2019	1,050	~2,400	Zamfara, Kaduna, Ondo
2021	2,100	~4,500	Niger, Kaduna, Katsina, Ondo
2023	2,850	~6,300	Zamfara, Kaduna, FCT, Enugu
2024	3,000+	~6,700	Zamfara, Kaduna, Ondo, Plateau

(Sources: Nigeria Security Tracker, SBM Intelligence, 2024; CLEEN Foundation, 2023)

Trend Analysis: Kidnapping incidents increased by over 45% between 2019 and 2024, with forests serving as operational bases for most abductions.

Banditry and Armed Violence

Banditry remains concentrated in the North-West (Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna), where gangs operate from forests and target villages.

Figure 1: Banditry-related Deaths in North-West Nigeria (2015–2023)

- 2015: ~1,100 deaths
- 2017: ~1,800 deaths
- 2019: ~2,500 deaths
- 2021: ~3,200 deaths
- 2023: ~3,800 deaths

(Source: NST, SBM Intelligence, 2024)

Banditry-related deaths nearly **tripled** between 2015 and 2023, underscoring the state's inability to police forested areas effectively.

Farmer–Herder Conflicts

Farmer–herder conflicts, often tied to grazing routes and forest land use, resulted in thousands of casualties, particularly in the Middle Belt (Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa).

- **2016–2023:** Over **8,000 deaths** attributed to farmer–herder clashes (NST, 2023).
- **2022:** Benue State recorded the highest number of farmers–herder fatalities, at 850 deaths.

Community Policing Outcomes

States that adopted community policing recorded **moderate but measurable improvements** in crime reduction.

- **Lagos State:** Community policing helped reduce petty theft and burglary rates by 18% between 2017 and 2021 (CLEEN Foundation, 2022).
- **Enugu State:** Pilot community policing project improved reporting of domestic violence and cult-related crimes, leading to a 22% increase in citizen trust in police (Ekwueme & Eze, 2021).
- **Kano State:** Local police–community partnerships disrupted extremist recruitment in targeted areas, lowering violent crime by 12% between 2018 and 2020.

Forest Guard Interventions

Where Forest Guards have been reintroduced, evidence suggests they played an important role in early detection and forest patrols.

- **Ondo State (2019–2023):** Forest Guards assisted in the rescue of **at least 50 kidnap victims** and disrupted multiple illegal logging operations (Ondo State Gov., 2023).
- **Ekiti State (2020–2022):** Forest Guard patrols reduced incidents of kidnapping in forest zones by **15%**, though sustainability was undermined by funding gaps.

- **Ebonyi State (2021):** Guards collaborated with police in joint patrols that led to the arrest of armed herders in forest reserves.

Summary of Findings

1. **Kidnapping is rising** nationwide, concentrated in forests.
2. **Banditry-related fatalities tripled** between 2015 and 2023.
3. **Farmer–herder conflicts remain deadly**, with >8,000 deaths (2016–2023).
4. **Community policing shows measurable improvements**, especially in urban settings (up to 20% reduction in crime rates).
5. **Forest Guards have proven effective**, but are limited by weak coordination and funding.

Analysis and Discussion

Why Insecurity Persists in Nigeria

The persistence of insecurity in Nigeria despite significant military and police deployments reflects several structural realities. First, insecurity is localized and community-driven, often tied to resource competition (e.g., farmer–herder conflicts) or territorial control (banditry and kidnapping in forests). Second, the geographical terrain of Nigeria complicates security responses. Forests such as *Rugu* in Zamfara/Katsina, *Kamuku* in Kaduna, and *Oluwa* in Ondo provide natural hideouts that the conventional military finds difficult to penetrate. Third, the erosion of public trust in the Nigeria Police Force and state institutions limits intelligence gathering, which is essential for proactive crime prevention.

Thus, conventional security approaches, heavily reliant on reactive force, have been unable to stem the tide of insecurity. Instead, grassroots-based, preventive, and trust-driven strategies like Forest Guards and community policing are better suited to address Nigeria’s security complexity.

Forest Guards as Rural Security Actors

The data presented highlight that forests account for a disproportionate share of insecurity in Nigeria. Kidnappers, bandits, and illegal loggers exploit the lack of surveillance in these ungoverned spaces. Forest Guards are uniquely positioned to address this problem because:

1. **Local Terrain Knowledge:** Forest Guards are usually recruited from local communities, giving them a superior understanding of terrain and forest pathways.
2. **Early Detection and Surveillance:** Patrols can identify criminal camps and suspicious movements before crimes escalate.
3. **Environmental Protection Linkages:** Guards can curb illegal logging and resource theft, which often finance criminal groups.

However, their effectiveness is undermined by limited training, inadequate funding, and a lack of coordination with federal forces. In Ondo and Ekiti, Forest Guards achieved modest successes in reducing forest-based kidnappings, but without integration into the broader security architecture, their impact remained localized and unsustainable.

Community Policing as an Urban/Semi-Urban Strategy

Community policing addresses the urban and semi-urban dimensions of insecurity, focusing on building trust between citizens and law enforcement. The Lagos, Enugu, and Kano case studies illustrate its strengths:

- **Crime Reduction:** Petty theft, burglary, and cult violence dropped by between 12–20% in areas with active community policing patrols.
- **Improved Intelligence Flow:** Citizens became more willing to report crimes when trust-building mechanisms were in place.
- **Social Cohesion:** Community policing facilitated partnerships between police, religious leaders, and traditional authorities, enhancing social legitimacy.

Nonetheless, community policing in Nigeria faces challenges. It is often politicized, with recruitment processes influenced by state governments. Poor funding and training limit sustainability, while overlaps with vigilante groups create confusion. Without a strong legal framework and federal–state coordination, its full potential remains unrealized.

Synergies between Forest Guards and Community Policing

Although often discussed separately, Forest Guards and community policing are **complementary strategies**:

- **Spatial Division of Labor:** Forest Guards specialize in rural and forested terrains, while community policing thrives in urban and semi-urban contexts.
- **Mutual Intelligence Sharing:** Forest Guards can track movements of kidnappers into towns, while community policing units can monitor ransom payment negotiations in cities.
- **Community Trust:** Both models rely on citizen cooperation, increasing chances of early warnings and collective responsibility for safety.

This synergy suggests that insecurity in Nigeria requires a hybrid security model, where localized initiatives complement national agencies.

Comparative Perspectives

Comparisons with other countries provide useful insights:

- **Kenya (Nyumba Kumi):** Community policing through neighborhood clusters improved counter-terrorism surveillance, demonstrating that local intelligence is critical in preventing attacks (Ruteere, 2016).
- **India (Forest Guards in Naxalite regions):** Guards serve dual roles in environmental protection and anti-insurgency patrols, showing parallels with Nigeria's forest insecurity (Sharma, 2019).
- **South Africa (Community Policing Forums):** Institutionalized forums legally bind communities and police to joint action, but persistent inequality and mistrust limit effectiveness (Faull, 2017).

These cases affirm that localized policing and Forest Guard models are not unique to Nigeria and can yield results if properly resourced and depoliticized.

Policy Implications

The evidence suggests that neither Forest Guards nor community policing should replace federal security agencies, but rather complement them. Integrating these models requires:

1. **Clear Legal Frameworks:** To avoid jurisdictional conflicts and political manipulation.
2. **Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:** Ensuring adequate training, equipment, and remuneration.
3. **Community Ownership:** Success depends on trust; hence, recruitment should prioritize local legitimacy over political patronage.
4. **Integration into National Security Architecture:** Forest Guards and community police units should share intelligence with the Nigeria Police Force, NSCDC, and military for coordinated operations.

Conclusion of Discussion

In sum, the analysis demonstrates that Nigeria's insecurity crisis cannot be solved by top-down, militarized approaches alone. Forest Guards and community policing represent bottom-up, citizen-centered strategies that, when institutionalized, provide a pathway toward sustainable security. Their success lies not only in reducing crime but also in rebuilding the broken social contract between citizens and the state.

Case Studies: Forest Guards and Community Policing in Practice

Zamfara State: Forest Insecurity and Banditry

Zamfara State epitomizes the crisis of forest-based insecurity in northwestern Nigeria. The Rugu Forest Reserve, spanning Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna, has become a stronghold for armed

bandits since 2011. Reports by SBM Intelligence (2023) indicate that more than 1,500 people were kidnapped in Zamfara between 2019 and 2023, with most incidents linked to forest hideouts. Although the state government experimented with dialogue and amnesty programs, the absence of a structured Forest Guard system allowed criminals to regroup. Community vigilantes (Yan Sakai) attempted to fill the gap but often escalated violence through reprisals. The case illustrates the dangers of ungoverned forests and the missed opportunity for structured local forest surveillance.

Kaduna State: Community Policing in Urban–Rural Transition Zones

Kaduna State presents a dual challenge: rural banditry in Birnin Gwari and Giwa, and urban crime in the Kaduna metropolis. In 2020, the state adopted the Community Policing initiative under the Nigeria Police Force’s framework. Pilot units established in Kaduna North and South LGAs led to a 15% drop in burglary and cult-related violence (CLEEN Foundation, 2022). However, community policing in Kaduna faced resistance in rural areas where banditry was entrenched, underscoring the need for Forest Guards in rural zones and community policing in urban centers.

Ondo State: Reactivation of Forest Guards

In 2019, Ondo State became one of the first to reactivate its Forest Guard system under the Amotekun Corps. The move was triggered by rising cases of kidnappings along the Akure–Owo and Owo–Ikare highways, where criminals exploited thick forest cover. The Forest Guards, operating in synergy with Amotekun, successfully dismantled several camps and disrupted illegal logging networks. Between 2020 and 2022, Ondo recorded a 25% reduction in reported forest-related kidnappings (NBS, 2023). Challenges persisted in terms of training and funding, but the case highlights the effectiveness of localized forest patrols when backed by political will.

Enugu State: Community Policing and Vigilante Integration

Enugu State adopted a hybrid model, integrating community policing with local vigilante groups under state oversight. The Enugu State Neighborhood Watch operates as a semi-formal policing institution, providing intelligence to the police. This model significantly improved **early**-warning systems for kidnapping and cultism, with a reported 30% increase in crime reporting rates between 2020 and 2023 (Nigerian Police Annual Report, 2023). The success of Enugu’s system lies in its community ownership, as traditional leaders and youth groups actively participate in recruitment and oversight. However, challenges include overlap with federal policing and risks of political interference.

Table 2. Case Study Summary Table

State Security Threat	Approach	Impact	Challenges
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Banditry, Zamfara kidnappings in forests	No structured Forest Guard; vigilantes are active	Continued high kidnapping rates; vigilantes escalated violence	Lack of structured forest surveillance
Rural Kaduna banditry urban crime	Community policing pilot (urban)	15% drop in burglary and cultism in urban areas	Rural areas are still under bandit control
Kidnappings in Ondo forest	Forest Guard Amotekun Corps	25% reduction in forest-related kidnappings	Funding, training gaps
Kidnapping Enugu cultism	Community policing Vigilantes	30% increase in crime reporting; improved intelligence	Overlaps with federal police

Source: Nigerian Police Annual Report, 2023

Synthesis of Case Studies

The case studies reveal regional variations in security threats and the suitability of strategies. Northern states such as Zamfara and Kaduna require a strong Forest Guard presence due to vast forested terrains exploited by bandits. Southern states like Ondo and Enugu demonstrate that community policing and hybrid models can yield measurable success when tailored to local contexts. Crucially, these examples show that one-size-fits-all approaches cannot work; Nigeria requires a context-sensitive hybrid security model integrating both strategies

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to strengthen the role of Forest Guards and community policing in solving Nigeria's insecurity challenges:

1. Establish a Clear Legal and Institutional Framework

The absence of a coherent legal foundation weakens both Forest Guards and community policing initiatives. The federal and state governments should develop legislation that:

- Defines the scope, jurisdiction, and responsibilities of Forest Guards.
- Integrates community policing units into the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) framework while allowing for state-level operational flexibility.
- Prevents political manipulation by mandating transparent recruitment and oversight mechanisms (Alemika, 2021).

2. Sustainable Funding Mechanisms

One of the recurring challenges across states is inadequate funding. Governments should:

- Dedicate budgetary allocations to Forest Guards and community policing.
- Explore partnerships with local governments, traditional rulers, and civil society organizations to co-finance community safety initiatives.
- Provide basic tools—communication devices, motorcycles, protective gear, and stipends—to ensure operability (CLEEN Foundation, 2022).

3. Training and Capacity Building

Professionalism and effectiveness hinge on training. Policy should prioritize:

- Joint training programs between Forest Guards, police, and civil defense to foster coordination.
- Specialized training in intelligence gathering, forest navigation, and conflict mediation.
- Exposure to international best practices in localized policing (Faull, 2017; Ruteere, 2016).

4. Integration into National Security Architecture

Rather than functioning in isolation, local security actors must be integrated with federal institutions:

- Forest Guards should coordinate with the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) for rural patrols.
- Community policing units should share intelligence with local divisional police headquarters for timely action.
- Establish state–federal joint security committees to avoid overlaps and rivalry (Sharma, 2019).

5. Community Ownership and Trust-Building

Both strategies rely heavily on citizen participation. Governments should:

- Ensure recruitment reflects community diversity, reducing bias and political favoritism.
- Institutionalize partnerships with traditional rulers, religious leaders, and youth groups.
- Promote accountability by setting up community oversight boards to monitor operations (Nigerian Police Annual Report, 2023).

6. Context-Specific Application

Case studies reveal that Nigeria’s insecurity is not uniform; strategies must fit the context:

- Forest Guards should be prioritized in northern and central states with vast forest cover (e.g., Zamfara, Kaduna, Benue).
- Community policing should be strengthened in southern and urban areas where crimes are less forest-based but more tied to urban dynamics (e.g., Enugu, Lagos, Rivers).
- Hybrid models like Ondo's Amotekun + Forest Guard synergy should be adapted regionally.

Conclusion

Nigeria's insecurity challenges cannot be solved by the military or federal police alone. Forest Guards and community policing represent bottom-up, citizen-driven approaches that complement state power with community trust, local intelligence, and preventive action. The statistical evidence shows measurable reductions in crime where these systems have been properly implemented. For sustainability, however, Nigeria must address structural issues of legality, funding, training, and integration. If institutionalized and depoliticized, Forest Guards and community policing could serve as cornerstones of hybrid security architecture, restoring safety, rebuilding trust, and enabling national development.

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