



Commentaries and Viewpoints

Bakassi and Vigilantism in Nigeria: Trajectory and Lessons for a Community Policing System

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Abstract

This paper is an historical reflection on how a local vigilante group (Bakassi-Boys) in South-Eastern Nigeria was formed. It examines how community policing systems and the use of magical powers were beneficial in the prevention and investigation of crimes. It shows also, how the use of spiritual powers in the detection and investigation of criminals was faulted on the ground that such methodology is unknown to Nigeria's laws. It argues that the outcry or view of seeing Bakassi-Boys as a security threat, its politicisation, and its abrupt stoppage are misplaced. The paper concludes that if the operations of the group were effective in the investigation of heinous crimes such as robbery and ritual killings and have reduced or rid a community of criminals, by implication, such vigilante apparatus could be employed as a template in the formation of community policing, especially considering the increasing level of insecurity in contemporary Nigeria.

Keywords: Bakassi Boys; Vigilantism; Security System; Community Policing; Criminality

Introduction

Nigeria has been and is still faced with a very high level of insecurity ranging from armed robbery, kidnapping, and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by criminals at various levels of the society. Notorious among them are armed robbery, ritual killings, Islamic Jihadism, banditry and

terrorism (perpetrated mostly by Boko Haram and Islamic State-West Africa Province [ISWAP]). This has heightened the discourse on the need for community policing in Nigeria. This in turn has resulted in the establishment of a local security organisation called Amotekun in South-Western Nigeria and Ebubeagu in South-Eastern Nigeria by the governors of the states in those regions, especially between 2015 and 2021. In spite of these efforts, such security units are yet to have the kind of security bite Bakassi-Boys brought into community policing system so much that criminals dread them. Therefore, this paper brings to the fore a reflection of the activities of the Bakassi-Boys in the late 90s and early 20s in Nigeria and the implication for contemporary Nigeria's local (community) security system.

The conceptual and contextual study of the word Bakassi, especially as it concerns community policing, has received little attention in scholarship. Although a few scholars have discussed Bakassi in previous literature they focused mostly on the Peninsula (geographical) and international conflict resolution perspectives (see for instance, Harnischfeger 2003; Anyu 2007; Konings 2011; Okoi 2016; Obodo & Akwen 2017; Akonye 2019; Opue & Usang 2020; Ogunnoiki 2020; Ottuh 2022). Besides, literature on Bakassi as a security outfit in South-Eastern Nigeria is scant (see Baker 2002; Smith 2004; Smith 2006; Ajeli 2020; Felbab-Brown 2021). Thus, this paper contributes to the ongoing research on security issues in Africa, particularly vigilantism in Nigeria, by suggesting the Bakassi Boys' variant for radical community policing. Although previous research, especially those from western perspective, see vigilantism as "ritual violence" which aligns with "religious rituals, interaction ritual", and "feelings of group unity" for revenge (Asif and Weenink 2022, 168-169), the Bakassi variant is not exactly the same as the western variant. Hence, an historical peep into the group is vital. This paper aims to give a historical reflection of how the local vigilante group called Bakassi Boys in South-Eastern Nigeria was formed and how it effectively fought crimes by using indigenous religious powers. The methodology of using abstract powers (religious powers) in detecting criminals and preventing crimes (crime prevention, investigation or otherwise) was faulted by some, especially those from a human right angles because such methods are not known to the law of Nigeria. As such, the paper argues that the view of seeing Bakassi Boys as a security threat, its politicisation and its abrupt stoppage are misplaced. This paper

thus focuses on the brief history of Bakassi Boys as a local security body and assesses the possible benefits of using the group as a template for future community policing system in Nigeria.

Bakassi as a Security Outfit in Nigeria: A History

The word Bakassi has many meanings in Nigeria, stretching from geographical location, romantic expression (encomium on beautiful ladies with big butt and hips) to a local security outfit. In previous research such meanings have been extensively discussed (see Ottuh 2022: 2-5). As a local community security outfit, the term Bakassi is clearer when used as “Bakassi Boys” but it will be used here interchangeably (Bakassi or Bakassi Boys). It was a novel and famous special local vigilante security formation in South-Eastern Nigeria which was well known for its use of African indigenous religious powers (charms) in its operations of preventing, detecting, and fighting crimes. Using a historical approach here, we focus on the brief history of Bakassi Boys as a local security body by exploring its origin/evolution, and modus operandi in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Evolution

The origin of Bakassi Boys (Bakassi) as a local vigilante group in South-East Nigeria can be traced to Aba, Abia State. Aba is a commercial city which harbours many traders of Igbo and non-Igbo origins. While Umuahia is the state capital, Aba is the commercial hub of the state (Abia state) due to its colossal commercial activities. The prosperity and relatively peaceful situation of the city attracted merchants and settlers alike from neighbouring states like Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Imo. Besides, by the mid-1990s merchants from Cameroon and as far as Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had established patronage of Aba made goods like shoes and garments in large quantities in Ariaria Market (see Meagher 2009, 41). The city was nicknamed as “the Japan of Africa” due to the productiveness of artisans and other professionals in the manufacturing of homemade goods like shoes, cloths, plastics, cosmetics, etc. These products became popularly known as “Aba made”, especially “owing to the fact that (Nigerians)... prefer foreign materials to our local manufactures” (Ajeli 2020, 32). The city of Aba is made up of various autonomous communities, comprising of Ndiego, Ogwo and Abayi Umuocha among others (Itiri & Jacob 2014,

277). The city, especially Aba South flourished in commercial activities and enjoyed relative peace until the late 1990s when an armed robbery gang called “Mafians” (also abbreviated as Mafs) began to torment the city (traders and residents) and its environs with robbery attacks and killings of innocent people. Apart from sporadic shootings, robbery and the gruesome murder of innocent citizens, there were also cases of rapes of women, torture, extortion, and lynching (Ajeli 2020, 33; see also, Itiri & Jacob 2014, 280). Record has it that between 1997 and 1999, over two hundred innocent people had been killed by Mafs and other armed robbery gangs in the city of Aba and environs (see Ajeli 2020, 33). The situation of insecurity at that time brought about low and slow income, especially among the garment and shoe manufacturers. The Mafs carried out their nefarious activities unhindered because the government security apparatus failed woefully to protect the lives and properties of the people. This failure of the Nigerian police was largely due to corruption, lack of capacity, and underfunding by the government (see Agbibo 2013). Due to the failure of the government security formation (police) in Aba, the situation of insecurity deteriorated to the level of the Mafs writing to residents and traders informing them of when they would come to rob them without any fear of being caught (Itiri and Jacob 2014). Moreover, the failure of government security apparatus not only fuelled Mafs’s activities but also heightened the operation of other groups of armed robbers in the area, causing residents to insinuate that police collaborated with the criminals. This occurrence made life difficult, brutish, and short.

The insecurity in Aba, especially in the Ariaria Market in which traders were incessantly harassed, robbed of their monies and wares, and maimed and killed, led to the formation of Bakassi Boys. It was formed by a group of traders, especially those in the shoe making industry of the ‘Bakassi’ area of Ariaria market where the name was coined. The leadership of the group was also from among them. They organised this local vigilante group with the sole purpose of putting an end to robbery activities and the excessive harassment and extortion by the hoodlums in the town (Ajeli 2020, 33). By November 1998 the battle to stop these hoodlums had gathered momentum leading to a fierce confrontation with the Mafians at the Aba Mosque area. In the process, there were exchanges of gunfire which led to the defeat of the Mafs; they were forced to leave “Emejiaka’s house” which they used as their hideout (Ajeli 2020, 34). Having decimated them from their hideouts, “the traders continued their

onslaught against the Mafs and their accomplices in such a way that some die-hard ones among them like GOC and Jango were killed and burnt while others were forced into exile” (Ajeli 2020, 34; see also, Jones 2008). Their resilience in the extermination of the Mafs made the other traders and residents nick-name the group Bakassi Boys, a name synonymous with gallantry. The successful onslaught of the Bakassi Boys against the Mafs and other criminal elements in Aba was partly possible as a result of the support of the populace who always provided them with useful information about the hideouts of criminals in the area. Apart from volunteering information, the people, especially the traders supported them financially also.

Bakassi Boys in the Wake of the Return to Democracy in Nigeria

In May 1999, Nigeria returned to democracy after several years of military rule. While the military was blamed for destroying the country’s economy and political system, the return of democracy which everyone thought would be better, especially for the economic prosperity of citizens, left a sour taste in the mouths of the people. Instead of bettering the lot of the people, it became the government of the rich and for the benefit of some. This also brought about the challenge of insecurity leading to the approval of various shades of vigilantism across the country (see Smith 2004, 429). Bakassi vigilantism in the wake of the return to democracy in May 1999 was warmly received and adopted by the then state governor of Abia State, Urji Uzor Kalu (CON) who served from 29 May 1999 to 29 May 2007. Based on the antecedents of the group in successfully defeating the dreaded armed robbery cartel, especially Mafs in the Ariaria Market in Aba and environs, Kalu sensed that the group would be useful in policing Abia State locally. Kalu so much believed in the Bakassi Boys that he resisted the Federal Government from banning it.

The Bakassi Boys became in high demand in the South-Eastern States, especially considering the fact that the criminals who escaped death in the hands of the Bakassi Boys in Abia State fled to neighbouring States like Imo and Anambra. By implication, as the crime rate in Aba was drastically reduced, other cities in South-Eastern Nigeria like Awka (the Capital city of Anambra), and the commercial cities of Onisha and Nnewi became criminal infested. The armed robbers in Anambra were so daring that they would shoot sporadically into the air at the front of

Government House in Awka on their way back from their operations. Besides, they wrote letters to their victims ahead of their raiding (see Itiri & Jacob 2014). They robbed, killed and maimed many residents and business operators. Coupled with armed robbers were ritual killers amongst whom was a prophet called Eddy Okeke. Among the notorious armed robbers in Anambra were Derico Nwamama, Chiejina, Eddie Nagwu, to mention a few. They terrorised Awka and, especially Onisha and Nnewi unhindered. Between 1998 and 2004, insecurity in Anambra state had become very alarming, especially the Upper Iweka and the fly-over areas in Onitsha. The city was bedevilled with assaults, rape, ritual killings, armed robbery, murder, brutality, and other terrible activities by hoodlums (Ajeli 2020, 1).

The above situation made Nnewi traders and residents in collaboration with Local Government Authorities take their fate into their own hands by extending invitation to the Bakassi Boys in Aba. With the arrival of the Bakassi Boys in late 1999 the narrative changed within a fortnight. Nnewi became free again and commercial activities boomed again. Seeing the security progress, the then governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju, in 2000 adopted the Boys as the official crime fighting apparatus of the state through legislation from the State House of Assembly and the support of the people. As such, they were equipped by the state government. The Bakassi Boys also rid Onisha of hoodlums and ritual killers, making commercial activities boom again. In spite of the so-called unorthodox and brutal methods of the Bakassi Boys, the Anambra people accepted and condoned them. The Bakassi Boys were disbanded by the Obasanjo administration in 2002 after several allegations of extrajudicial killings by them.

Modus operandi and Success of Bakassi Boys

The failure of the police and other government security elements necessitated the quest for an alternative solution to the security problem in Aba, Nigeria. By 1997 and 1999, at least two hundred traders and residents had been killed by Mafs and other armed robbery gangs in the city of Aba. Since a strong problem requires a proportionate solution, the Bakassi Boys rose to the occasion by taking the fight to the dens of the assailants and their secret hideouts. The Boys armed themselves with locally made guns, machetes, and arrays of black magic artefacts and Juju worn around their bodies (Harnischfeger 2003). They put on such magic

artefacts to supply them with spiritual powers and to fortify themselves spiritually. The fortification included charms of abstract bullet-proofs derived from African indigenous religious means, such that when they are shot at by the assailants they will say “odeichi” which means “no leakage, no entry”, or “it cannot penetrate”. By implication, bullets (physical and spiritual) and machetes including spells cannot penetrate them. It was speculated that the mystical powers of the Bakassi Boys were derived principally from Ogoni and Ngwa deities in collaboration with other similar deities in Igboland.

Drawn from their spiritual powers, the Boys used a lie detector charm to detect criminals who have committed heinous crimes, especially murder previously. The charms are made to domicile in two items, a special machete and a native necklace (like a talisman). These charms helped them to ascertain whether a suspect is guilty or not. The lie detector apparatus was used in two ways; either the machete is placed across the upper chest of the suspect or the necklace is placed around the neck of the suspect. When the machete is placed and it shows red, it means the suspect is guilty of armed robbery and murder, and when the necklace is placed on the neck of the suspect, the suspect will confess the atrocities he/she has committed against humanity (see Ajibade 2006; Felbab-Brown 2021, 20). It is believed that the charm-imbued necklace makes it difficult for a criminal to lie. As such, the criminal was executed. The Boys’ onslaught against Mafs and other criminal elements was so fierce that they captured some of the armed robbers and executed them in public spaces like a major intersection of roads or market centres, attracting large numbers of observers. Sometimes they dismembered the bodies of the apprehended criminals with machetes, starting with what the local people referred to as 'long sleeve' or 'short sleeve', and set the bodies ablaze to burn to ashes (Smith 2004, 431; Ajeli 2020, 33). Thus, the modus operandi of the Bakassi Boys made the criminals to dread them. As such, criminals who were able to escape fled to nearby states like Rivers, Imo, Anambra, etc. This brought relative peace to Aba city. In a nutshell, the coming of the Bakassi Boys checked this menace within a short time.

The operation of the Bakasssi Boys in Aba could, therefore, be regarded as effective and successful. Their success in ridding Aba of criminals made them famous then, such that people of neighbouring states, especially Anambra, extended invitation to them to come and do same. By late 1999 they had responded to the invite. Eventually, the Boys

replicated their operations in Anambra State between 1999 to 2002 in which about 1,500 criminals were killed, especially in Onitsha and Nnewi axes (see Uchendu 2000). Just like they did in Aba, within the period they operated, they were able to restore peace in Nnewi and Onitsha. Irrespective of their method which some considered as devilish, brutal, and illegal, the obvious remains that the Bakassi Boys brought peace and tranquillity to Abia and Anambra states during the period they genuinely operated.

The Stoppage of the Bakassi Security Outfit in South-Eastern Nigeria

In September 2002, the activities of the Bakassi-Boys were abruptly stopped by government due to their jungle justice system of executing suspected criminals without any trial in a court of competent jurisdiction. The Boys were also accused of killing political opponents of the sitting state governors in their jurisdiction of operation or their benefactors (see Meagher 2007, 89-91). Besides, they were accused of armed robbery and serious human right abuse (Smith 2006, 166-190; Human Rights Watch 2002; Felbab-Brown 2021, 20-26). This brought about some public outcries against the operation of the group (see Human Rights Watch 2002). In a nutshell, these outcries point to two factors. The first factor is the suspicion of the politicisation of the Bakassi Boys. The second factor was the view by some that Bakassi poses a security threat to innocent citizens due to their operation of jungle justice. Some doubt if the Bakassi Boy's investigations were truly accurate. Some accuse the outfit of being a security threat to the community because some high and mighty personalities and their relations were affected. This becomes more complicated considering the fact that spiritual means of investigating crimes is not known to the laws of Nigeria. This was a very strong point that led to the disbandment of the outfit by government. In spite of the stoppage of Bakassi vigilante group, the name remains a household name in south-eastern Nigeria till present times.

Although the Nigerian law does not recognise the investigation of crime using spiritual means, the success of the group in chasing away criminals from the community should also be considered enough ground to contemplate a more lawful modification rather than throwing the baby and the bathwater away. I therefore argue here that the outcry or view of seeing the original Bakassi-Boys as security threat and politicised, leading to its abrupt stoppage, is misplaced in the sense that such opinions

undermines the effectiveness of such an organisation in fighting recurrent variants of security problems in contemporary Nigeria.

Politicising the outfit by a governor is also misplaced in the sense that such acts amounts to abuse of political powers. It is also wrong on the side of the group to allow their benefactors or a sitting governor to use them against an opponent or perceived enemies among the citizens. However, if it is true that politicians including the state governor were able to use them against innocent citizens, that must raise a serious doubt about the authenticity and integrity of a group that claimed to be spiritual, pious and incorruptible, and dedicated to fighting criminals, especially those who had taken innocent blood through ritual killings and armed robbery. It simply means they were hypocritical. But the success of their operation in taking out notorious criminals in Aba and Anambra states should also raise questions about how people claiming such spiritual powers could stoop low to allow a governor or politicians to manipulate them to take the life of innocent citizens, an act totally against their original principles. It is very possible that those aspersions against them were political propaganda by opponents of the governor or the very perpetrators or sponsors of heinous acts. It is also possible that an adulterated group may have impersonated the group, as portrayed in the Nigerian Movie "Isakaba." Aspersions without in depth investigation and the abrupt stoppage of the outfit are misplaced in the sense that the citizens and the leadership were supposed to be on the same page as far as the genuine security of the community was concerned. All those who compromised the group, leading to its disbandment, could not have cared for the security and welfare of community.

Judging from the spiritual standpoint on which the security principle of Bakassi stands - "do not steal, do not kill and do not compromise" - suggests some of the allegations of using it against opponents could just be a fallacy or conspiracy. This kind of security outfit is the type Nigeria truly needs for community policing. However, the fear of the Federal Government (FG) of Nigeria about approving state or community policing formation is due to the suspicion that politicians might hijack it and use it against opposition or perceived enemies, especially considering the aspersions against Bakassi Boys as a case in point. Nevertheless, the need for community policing formation using the Bakassi model will be beneficial in Nigeria, especially considering the fact that the FG security (policing) structure has been over stretched,

compromised, and has utterly failed. It should therefore be backed by laws enacted by the State Houses of Assembly and the National Assembly. In order to achieve this, an Independent Security Formation Central Monitoring System can also be put in place by the FG to monitor the activities of the community police system instead of banning it completely. These are the kind of security group criminals in Nigeria dread. Their mere presence in a community discourages criminals and chases criminals away.

The stoppage is also misplaced because all commentators, especially scholars and the human right group itself, have been very paradoxical in their submissions. While they accuse the Bakassi Boys of human right abuses, they acknowledge the real success of the group in fighting criminality in the locality of Aba and environs, a function the Nigerian police could not perform. As far back as 2000 when Nigeria returned to democracy, research has shown that insecurity was very high (Baker 2002, 223), and the situation has worsened since. Moreover, the human right commentators should also go a long way to speak more and condemn more the perpetrators of heinous crimes in the society than those who are trying to clean the system. While human right organisations such as Amnesty International and National Human Rights Commission are encouraged to watch how government treats its people in terms of human rights, they should in addition look into the atrocities of criminals who have been abusing the rights of Nigerians and taking lives at will. This will encourage citizens who are willing to confront such people squarely to do so.

Implication for Community Policing in Contemporary Nigeria

Is there any social lesson that can be learnt from the development (narrative) of Bakassi as a local security outfit in South-Eastern Nigeria? An objective examination of Bakassi Boys' variant of vigilantism shows that Nigeria needs such formidable community policing system. This suggestion is not motivated by emotion or sentiment but by the very reasons that brought Bakassi Boys into existence. The reason was simply the failure of government in providing adequate security of lives and properties, and lack of or delay of justice. Those who have soldiers and mobile police as their security guards can look at our law and call the activities of the Bakassi boys "jungle justice" because they have never been hurt or their close relations killed by the criminal elements. The

impunity with which armed criminals operated in Aba and other places the Boys were invited to for security purpose left much to be desired. The hoodlums incapacitated the police and brought terror on the people unchallenged. When the Bakassi vigilante was formed, they were able take out the criminals with ease, a duty the police could not do for the people. Therefore, the reformation of the Bakassi vigilante variant in local communities across Nigeria will be helpful in the support of the police in fighting crime. While we agree with international conventions on fighting crimes and justice system (rules of engagement), the operators have refused to adequately punish governments under whose watch gruesome killings of innocent citizens were perpetrated, and the criminals never brought to justice. Just like other nations that have added punitive measures to what they regard as heinous crimes (Leechaianan & Longmire 2013, 117), Nigeria should do same for kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, armed robbery, Jihadism, and drug trafficking. When such laws are enacted in Nigeria and properly executed without corruption, incessant killings will reduce drastically. When trials are quick and thorough through special courts of competent jurisdiction, it will speed up the wheel of justice. This will reduce crime in Nigeria to a barest minimum. But when murderous criminals continue to get away or carry out crimes unchallenged, the chances of ruling out jungle justice will be very slim. In a nutshell, the government failure in the security of lives and properties and lack of justice are the major cause of jungle justice in Nigeria.

Another lesson that can be learnt from the narrative of Bakassi as a local vigilante is that the citizens trust the local vigilante more than the men of the Nigerian Police Force. This is so because the police keep failing in their duties of securing lives and properties of the people. The trust for the police has declined to an abysmal level, such that many people suspect that when criminals are handed over to the police, they often simply collect bribes from the criminals and release them (Ajeli 2020, 43). The people suspected that the police have become the friend of the criminals. The case of the notorious kidnap kingpin Wadume (Hamisu Bala) in Taraba state is one instance in recent time, though the Nigerian Army and the Judiciary is responsible in this case (see Adeniyi 2024). This incident though not in Aba in the Bakassi era, gives credence to such suspicion of security personnel (army and police) befriending criminals. Besides, when the police are called during an attack, they will

simply say; “no bullet, no fuel for vehicle or no vehicle.” The lack of trust for the police also inhibited citizens from volunteering information to them about criminals’ hideouts. This was not found in the Bakassi system. As such the people and other traders volunteered information and even contributed money to sponsor the Bakassi Boys because they were delivering. The trust issue is still there. The police need to redeem its image before the people; otherwise, the narrative will exist for centuries to come. Besides the police, governments have not been willing to or sincere in the fight against crime. The failure of the police is partly caused by the lack of equipment or what we may call inadequate funding. Overall, the Federal Government is to blame mostly for the failures.

Another lesson to be learnt from the Bakassi Boys for contemporary community policing in Nigeria is the spirit of commitment and dedication in the fight against insecurity. If there is one thing the government of Nigeria lacks, then and now, it is the political will to fight insecurity to a standstill. The success story of the Bakassi Boys apart from the use of spiritual powers was commitment and dedication to their job.

Unlike some police officers, they never brought politics of ethnicity, religion and cronyism into the equation. They never compromised the system or neglected their duty for bribes as some policemen do. As far as they were concerned, a criminal is a criminal irrespective of ethnic (Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba) or religious (Christian or Muslim or traditionalist) affinity. We as a nation should understand that a challenge in any part of the country should be seen as a threat to the entire nation. Community policing formation in contemporary Nigeria should draw inspiration from the Bakassi Boys’s variant. Such groups including the Nigerian Police Force should be committed and dedicated to their duty of fighting crimes in the society. They should not be seen as a people that are corrupt (aiding) criminals.

A further lesson that can be derived from the activities of the Bakassi Boys is their method of taking the fight to the criminals, thereby preventing them from carrying out their nefarious acts. They never waited for criminals to operate and then start arresting people at random. Even if armed robbery took place, the Boys went after the assailants, making them pay for their actions. The original Bakassi Boys never arrested people at random like the police do in Nigeria. They made sure they went directly to the criminals in their hideouts and brought them to instant justice (otherwise called jungle justice). While we may not support jungle

justice for any reason, the indefatigable effort of the vigilante is worth noting for community policing. They were so efficient, so much that they were able to send the signal to the criminals that they cannot get away with their evils. The criminals must be caught quickly and brought to justice. As such, those who have taken the lives of others in the process of armed robbery or ritual killings could not escape the justice of Bakassi, hence the criminals dread them. In the current situation of insecurity in Nigeria, the assailants are no longer afraid of being caught. They are no longer afraid of being brought to justice because they have always got away with it. They are no longer afraid of the Nigerian Army let alone the police. A good reflection on the activities of the original Bakassi Boys shows that an effective community policing will be profitable for the long run security of Nigeria. A local (community) policing system backed by law to use whatever means to detect crime and bring perpetrators to speedy justice should be encouraged. The Nigerian localities need a security variant that will be dreaded by the assailants, not the other way around.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the formation of the local vigilante group called Bakassi Boys in South-Eastern Nigeria was effective and worth replicating for community policing, especially considering the increasing insecurity across the country in recent times. It has also shown that, although their methodology of using spiritual means in the detection of criminals is unknown to the law of Nigeria, their success story of taking the fight to the criminals and defeating them may not be out place in considering a better legal framework that will commensurate with such context of crime fighting in the local milieu of Nigeria. Imagine having a vigilante group like the Bakassi Boys that can confront Boko Haram, ISWAP, bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers, herdsman militias, and so on. It would be possible to get the support of the majority of Nigerians and even the National Assembly. Nigeria and especially human right groups by now should come to the reality that an extraordinary problem also needs a corresponding solution. As such, it may not be out of place to suggest a special legal framework for such vigilante groups like Bakassi-Boys to deal with these hardened criminals who do not respect human rights in the first place. The legal system of Nigeria should ensure that people who take the lives of innocent citizens at will must not escape

justice within the ambit of the law. When this happens, it will deter others with similar intent.

Suffice it to say that if the operations of the group were effective in the investigation of heinous crimes such as robbery and ritual killings in which they were able to rid the community of Aba and environs of dreaded criminals, it will not be out of place to recommend a replication of such vigilante apparatus that could fight terrorism, banditry, armed robbery, etc in Nigeria's local communities. While we think of this on the one hand, government must also be sincere in looking at the remote reasons (abject poverty, unemployment, hunger, marginalisation, injustice) that turn youths into criminals. Fighting criminality should be total and purpose driven. The economic and political situations that breed criminality in Nigeria must also be clearly addressed by government. While we wait for government to address this, security of lives and properties of citizens must be of paramount importance. In a nutshell, the Bakassi Boys have shown to us that a formidable community policing is possible in contemporary Nigeria.

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Appendix 1

Figures 1& 2: Photo of Bakassi Boys in Action



Source: Uchenna (2020) .