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Exploring Community Security Interventions Using Design Thinking Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study uses design thinking to explore the creation and usage of community security intervention tools. Four communities in the Asokore Mampong Municipality in Ghana were selected purposively for the study. Data were gathered through focus group discussions and interviews using the design thinking approach. The findings of the study revealed that design thinking is an appropriate tool for in-depth data gathering. On the security level, it was revealed that neighborhood watch-dog and volunteer groups were the two major crime prevention tools used in the communities.

KEYWORDS

Community security; watch-dog; volunteer; design thinking

Introduction

Security is a pre-requisite for sustainable growth and development (Odidison, 2004). It is defined as the prevention of crime by citizens, the detention and charging of culprit legally to maintain peace and order (Wahab, 2004). Generally, the government is responsible for the provision of security to its citizens (Abudu, Nuhu, & Nkuahet, 2013). However, significant shifts have been occurring over the last several decades in most developing countries, because the government's security provisions have been largely inadequate (Olonisakin, Ikpe, & Badong, 2009). Consequently, this has led to most people resorting to 'self-help' mechanisms using the non-government sector to address their security needs (Olonisakin et al., 2009).

Community securities arrangements are one of such non-government security provision that exists in many African countries, including Ghana. These noncommercial security systems are mainly found at the local community levels and usually provide security for not-profit. Community security systems include neighborhood watch committees and community policing. Some problems are however associated with some of these

community security arrangements, including mob actions, liaising for criminal activities like armed robbery, kidnappings, and extortion (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2008). Such problems notwithstanding, the majority of the urban neighborhood still see such systems offering practical solutions and consequently patronize their services.

Despite some of the problems associated with security provided by these non-government actors in developing countries, majority of citizens turn to these non-government security systems, which are seen as largely legitimate, to meet their security and justice needs. However, theoretically little is known about how community security interventions are designed and the various roles played by the involved actors. It is against this background that this study was conducted on community security interventions for crime preventions in growing neighborhoods in Ghana. Asokore Mampong is one of such growing municipalities in the Ashanti region and has a high population growth rate of 8.6% per annum (GSS, 2014). Due to the high population growth rate, crime prevalence has taken the center stage of many localities in the Asokore Mampong municipality (GSS, 2014). In an effort to reduce crime prevalence among the localities, many of the communities in the localities have resorted to the use of self-help interventions to secure their safety and prevent crimes. These interventions are initiated by the institutions through Private Security Companies, Neighborhood Watch Committees, NGOs and Civil Society Groups. The Neighborhood Watch Committee is one of the self-help security interventions that have been instituted to prevent criminal activities in the Asokore Mampong Municipality.

Conflicts, violence robbery, and theft

The causes of conflict and violence are similar and are diverse in nature. Some important factors which can easily trigger conflict and violence in the community are under-development, poverty, and inequality. Concentrating on conflict and violence they highlighted that whereas conflict and violence can be caused by underdevelopment, at the alternative look, the two can also lead to underdevelopment (Richardson & Sen, 1996). According to Kendie and Bukari (2014), conflict and violence can also be caused by ethnocentrism, the lack of access to the position of influence such as kingship and political positions and the lack of access to resources such as land. Ethnocentrism is a common cause for ethnic conflict and violence and it is the situation where one ethnic group feels superior to the other group which is clearly manifested in terms of access to resources, behavioral pattern, attitude and others (Kendie & Bukari, 2014).

Robbery and theft cases have become a common crime in many societies around and in identifying the causes of armed robbery and theft. Crime cases increased from 478 to 538 in 2016 and increased again in 2018 to 656 and in the case of robbery, the cases increased from 1126 in 2012 to 1919 in 2018 (Appiah, 2018; Tankebe & Boakye, 2019). It was discovered also that some authorities are the main cause because the resources meant for the provision of education, jobs, and infrastructures to enhance livelihood are siphoned, mismanaged or embezzled by leaders in society (Ribadu, 2006). As a result, economic conditions have become very harsh for many dwellers. Thus, many are in the net of poverty and unemployment and as such resort to theft and robbery to survive. Arinze (2010) accepted the claims of Ribadu (2006) and further added that high inflations also contribute to theft and robbery. The fact that unemployment leads to robbery and thievery has also been supported by Umar (2015) who argued that the lack of jobs forces the youths in communities to engage in crimes such as theft and robbery. According to Brown (2004), education can be a great weapon to fight against theft and robbery. It is possible through seeing education as a tool used for human capital investment to increase future legitimate work opportunities, which would possibly discourage participation in crime (Lochner, 2011). Again, education on the need for patience may also be given to individuals to discourage crime because any forward-looking individuals may place greater weight on any expected future punishment associated with their criminal activities (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012) and rather work hard towards achieving their goals.

Design thinking: an exploratory tool for data gathering

Design is a strategic problem-solving tool and a creative process which does not deal with only the creation of artifacts and its associated esthetics, but also provides innovative and enabling alternatives through synthesizing old and new ideas, which go beyond form and function, to value and viability (The Designers Accord, 2010). The design thus elicits the formulation of structured solutions to address “wicked” societal problems (Chick & Micklethwaite, 2011). There are different approaches to handling design based on the purpose of the design. In investigations and solutions provisions, one of the design approaches that is used is design thinking. Design thinking as an emerging concept extends beyond making a plan for the production of artifacts or rendering of design-related services for clients (Fuad-Luke, 2009). Thus, design thinking can be used to create messages, services, and processes aimed at propagating ideal social, institutional, environmental and economic change that will alter the attitudes of

community members towards a desired behavior pattern and practice (Fuad-Luke, 2009).

Design thinking is therefore seen as a placeholder concept, which permits an array of conceptual alternatives to be investigated (Halse & Boffi, 2016). Halse and Boffi (2016) add that design intervention is also a research method meant not for only testing proposed solutions to a defined problem but also for exploring different forms of experience to expose and rectify habits, norms, and standards. It is based on this relevance of design as an exploring tool that design thinking was adopted for this research. “Design Thinking is Human-centered problem-solving tool which emphasizes on empathy, collaboration, co-creation and stakeholder feedback to unlock creativity and innovation, which devises feasible and viable big Idea/solutions” (Royal Civil Service Commission, 2017). Design thinking is therefore not out of place to be used for exploring community security interventions. In this research, it was employed as a tool for exploring how the community interventions are created and how they function. How the design thinking was used for mining the data has been captured under the research method.

Description of the study area: Asokore Mampong municipality in Ghana

Asokore Mampong Municipality is one of the municipalities in the Ashanti region of Ghana. It shares boundaries with the Kumasi Metropolis to the east, west, and south, the Ejisu Juaben Municipality to the south-east and the Kwabre East Municipality to the north-west. The total population is about 304,815 and covers land area of about 23.91 km² and the Municipality itself is heterogeneous with various ethnic groups such as the Akans (40.9%), Northerners (36.7%), Guans (10.7%), Ga-Adagme (0.9%) and Ewe (3.0%) (GSS, 2010). The Municipality’s growth rate is about 8.6% which is higher than the regional growth rate of 3.5%. This has contributed to the rapid population growth and congestion in the Municipality (GSS, 2014). In terms of security issues, the Municipality has over the years become one of the predominant crime zones in the Ashanti region after the Kumasi Metropolis. *Aboabo*, *Aboabo Zongo*, *Asokore Mampong* and *Sawaba* have been tagged as areas where crimes such as theft and robbery, violence and threats, assault and others are very high based on the number of reported cases to the Ghana Police Service from the stated communities.

Research method

The study adopted a qualitative research design using Asokore Mampong Municipality as the study space. The research was situated in the

interpretive paradigm. Both primary and secondary data were espoused for the study. The primary data was collected through focus group discussions amid key informant interviews. The key informant interviews were done with community leaders, watchdog committees and other security officers in the Ghana Police Service. Focus group discussions were done in all the four communities with community members to know how they designed out and the effects of the committees' security intervention activities. The members were purposely selected and each group consisted of ten people. The four communities were purposively selected and there were; *Aboabo*, *Asokore Mampong*, *Sepe-Timpom*, and *Sawaba*. They were selected because they had the community security interventions. Ten (10) members each from the four communities were interviewed. Thematic analysis was espoused to analyze the data obtained.

Design thinking as a method for in-depth data gathering was used for this study. The four design thinking processes that directed the interview questions and focus group discussions were *discover*, *define*, *develop* and *deliver*. In the space of *discover*, empathy was used to explore how the members of the security intervention committees analyzed how the thieves in the community operated through asking those who had been attacked before and at times the volunteers disguise themselves to join the criminals for information. The volunteers at times engage in *shadowing* (*follow suspects without their notice*) to track suspected people. The exact security challenges were identified or defined and probed further for surety under the define stage. In the space of ideation or develop, the community security members adopted and modified already existing solutions. In the space of *deliver*, as the last processes of design thinking, the community's members engage in that suggested solutions outright. Thus, the *develop* and *deliver* phases merged in a sublime way and were modified as the situation demanded. Though design thinking comes with a lot of drawings for easy comprehension of situations, in all the phases since visualization is its bedrock, in this research the participants were majorly illiterates and therefore were not able to express themselves visually.

Findings

The findings were categorized into four areas of the design thinking phases. However, the first three phases were hardly used by the participants so the findings centered on the last stage which was the *deliver* stage. In the first phase, which is the *discover* phase, it was revealed that they used the information from those who have been attacked to *define* and formulate their strategy for the community security intervention. However, the strategies were just ideas and were not documented. They, therefore, developed their

ideas based on their mental pictures. Basing on the *deliver* phase, it was revealed in the study that all the four selected communities have designed and instituted a neighborhood watchdog committee (NWC) as a self-help intervention to prevent crimes. The activities of the NWC in the respective communities have been outlined and discussed under various thematic areas.

The neighborhood watchdog committees in Aboabo

The neighborhood watchdog committee (NWC) has been in operations for the past 22 years. Thus, the group is identified as the '*Aboabo Volunteer Group*'. The group was formed with the quest to fight against crime which was very rampant in Aboabo. Due to the high level of enthusiasm at the onset, 30 individuals, all men from the community joined the group. However, a lack of community support made some individuals withdraw from the group. Currently, the group is made up of 10 members. According to the Watch-Dog Committee of Aboabo, the main strategy used to prevent crime is '*hide and catch*'. With this strategy, the volunteers have specific joints noted as avenues for criminal meetings and planning. Thus, volunteers hide around these '*criminal zones*' around 12:00 am which has been identified as the crucial time for criminal meetings and operations. In some cases, the volunteers disguise themselves and visit suspected individuals to gather information as to whether or not such individuals are actors impeding community security and safety of the people in the community. They use blue-black uniform for the easy arrest of criminals since it becomes quite difficult for criminals to easily see members in such apparel at night. The security tools used to fight crimes include single barrel guns, torchlight, and canes.

Neighborhood watch-dog committee strategy in Asokore Mampong

The Asokore Mampong volunteer group was instituted in 2010 to liaise with security forces and community members to enhance security. The approach used by the volunteer group is a community initiative. The strategy used in enhancing community security by the volunteers is '*pair-wise patrolling*' approach. The volunteers move around the community in pairs in the night to ensure that every household is well secured. The patrolling is foot with the use of whistle as a form of security alarm and guns. The watchdog members unveiled that the community is not too big making the foot patrolling possible. They use blue-black uniform to patrol and to arrest of criminals at night. Guns and whistles are used to fight crimes.

Neighborhood watchdog committee strategy in Sawaba

The security strategy is a community-initiated group spearhead by the chief of the community. The community security strategy used is the ‘*call on us for help*’ and ‘*patrolling*’. An interview with the Watchdog Committee members revealed that the volunteers are usually called upon by the community for security services when there are criminal activities going on. Apart from that, the volunteers move around at midnight to ensure that there are no criminal works going in the community, especially theft. Ash uniforms are used by the members for easy identification during their watchdog activities. Though this helps in proper coordination of activities whilst in operations, it becomes easy for criminals to identify and escape from their operations. They use knives, cutlasses, sticks, torch lights and whistles as their physical tools to fight the criminals.

Security strategies used by neighborhood watchdog in Sepe-Timpom

The watchdog committee of Sepe-Timpom was instituted in 2015 due to the recent uproar attributed to crime and other issues of security in the community. Unlike the other three neighborhoods, the approach to community security is private initiative. It was identified that a private individual (religious leader) influenced the formation of the watchdog committee to protect church properties. The initial aim of the group has grown to cover the entire community with the quest to protect members of the community. The strategies used are ‘*patrolling and stop for a check*’. With this strategy, the members divide themselves into either two or three groups, and each group has its assigned task to perform at that particular period. Whilst one or two groups patrol the community, the other group stands at checkpoints/barriers to monitor vehicles moving to and fro at night. It was also revealed that the watch-dog committee operates at 12:00 am–4:00 am since this is the period during which criminals operate in the community. They also check vehicles at the entrance point to ensure that persons entering are not criminals while the patrol team also moves around to check on activities going on in the community. They also added that the strategies have strengthened community security and crime has reduced to the barest minimum. Guns, whistles and torch lights are used to fight crimes however they do not wear any prescribed uniforms as identified with the order communities.

Discussions

From the findings, the NWCs have helped to fight crimes at the local level which in turn have ensured peaceful co-existence and sanity in

the communities. The watchdogs' members and some of the community members added that *"Crime rates have reduced since the formation of the NWCs making people feel safe to live in the community because of the presence of the NWCs"*. The NWCs have augmented the efforts of the Police in fighting crimes. The NWCs, aside from their normal operations also provide relevant information to be acted upon by the police and this has made it quite easy in fighting crime in their communities. This implies the NWCs presence cannot be taken for granted or seen as a mere group but a crucial group that should be given the necessary support to enable them to achieve their set mandates.

Regardless of the enormous benefits that come as a result of the operations of the NWCs, it was revealed that some members of the NWCs join hands with the criminals to commit a crime. An interview with some of the youth in the Aboabo community revealed that there have been instances where the NWCs members connive with the criminals to attack innocent people while some of NWCs sometimes take money from the criminals to allow them to operate without attacking them. One elder of the Aboabo community revealed that *"Some members of the NWCs sometimes arrest criminals and demand an amount to be paid to them to allow them to go scot-free. Another key issue is that background check is not properly done before someone is allowed to join the NWCs."* This according to the NWCs is a serious issue that needs to be addressed because there had been an instance where a member of the NWC was caught as a criminal. This implies that the NWCs mode of enrollment needs to be revised with the assistance of national security officials.

Conclusion

The local security interventions designed to prevent crime by the four communities have shown that the locals also play a major role in security issues that concern them. The designed security interventions were *Hide and seek, Pair-wise Patrol, Call-on-us -for-help and patrol and the last one was the Patrol and stop-for-check*. These interventions were mostly for robbery and theft. However, the NWCs do not take the laws into their hands and melt out instant justice rather any suspected person or culprit is handed over to the government forces for investigations and legal actions. The guns and the other tools used in their operations are meant to scare off the perpetrators and also to defend themselves.

Figure 1 gives a summary model of the interventions used for achieving low-crime communities. The diagram shows how crime communities may become low/crime-free communities through the implementation of the four watchdog security interventions within the affected communities.

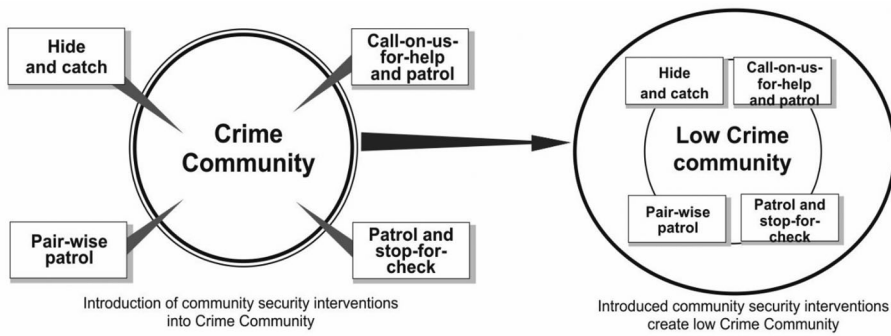


Figure 1. A model on how crime communities may become low-crime communities (Authors’).

The four watchdog security interventions are: *Hide and seek*, *Pair-wise patrol*, *Call-on-us -for-help and patrol* and the last one was the *Patrol and stop-for-check*.

Practical recommendation

Apart from one NWC which was privately instituted, the rest were volunteer groups thus some of the rest of the NWCs were on the verge of collapsing due to lack of financial support from the community members and the Municipal Assembly. To ensure sustainable community security interventions, the study recommends that community members should be sensitized to understand the operations of the community security teams in order to support them financially in their operations.

Policy recommendation

On a policy level, the Municipal Assembly should enact legislative instrument to back the community security operations for efficiency and effectiveness. Communities with crime issues should also adopt or modify the above security interventions to suit their areas.

Further research recommendation

Design thinking as an approach for in-depth data gathering also proved worthwhile. However, further research can be conducted to explore the challenges in the usage of the first three phases of design thinking by the community security volunteers from an innovative thinking approach or perspective.

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