



# Accountability Brief

*A Policy Brief on the Special Anti-Robbery Squad towards ensuring effective service delivery and accountability.*

19<sup>th</sup> September, 2019

## **A ROAD MAP FOR THE SUSTAINABLE REFORM AND RESTRUCTURE OF THE FEDERAL SPECIAL ANTI ROBBERY SQUAD (F-SARS) TOWARDS ENSURING EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**



### Executive Summary

*“The average SARS operative in today’s Nigeria represents intimidation, force, torture, harassment and extortion instead of safety and responsiveness. So many Nigerians have lost their lives and money to them. This is bad. This is not good for our growing national development and nascent democracy”*



### BACKGROUND

The mere mention of the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) at the federal level and Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in the state commands evokes odious emotions, sending palpable distress signals to an average Nigerian especially within the commercial cities of the country; this is traceable to either previous personal experience, that of an acquaintance or those revealed in the media. Habeeb Whyte in his online article writes that *“The average SARS operative in today’s Nigeria represents intimidation, force, torture,*

*harassment and extortion instead of safety and responsiveness.*

*So many Nigerians have lost their lives and money to them. This is bad. This is not good for our growing national development and nascent democracy”*<sup>1</sup> This development is contrary to the founding precepts of SARS.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has since inception operated an Anti-Robbery unit/section under the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) both federally and in the zonal and state commands. A former Inspector General of Police Sir Mike Mbama Okiro (IGP Rtd.) stated in an interview with Daily Trust Newspaper which was published on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017 that SARS started with him as the Deputy Commissioner of Police Operations in Ikeja, Lagos State. He recalled that the SARS was created in Lagos at the time of the notorious armed robbery kingpin Shina Rambo. He noted that this Special Anti-Robbery Squad was able to effectively tackle the horrific effects of Shina Rambo and other notorious

<sup>1</sup> Nwosu, S., Awoyinfa, S., Adepppegba, A., Okere A. and Makide F. (2018). Has IGP Kept his Promise to Reform SARS?

<https://punchng.com/has-the-igp-kept-his-promise-to-reform-sars>.

armed robbers in Lagos state, causing other state commands to form their own SARS units/sections. Today, SARS exists in every command of the Force with their duties now expanded to include tackling other heinous crimes<sup>2</sup>.

Over the years, SARS has performed remarkably well in the discharge of its duties in arresting some notorious criminals in different parts of the country<sup>3</sup>. Its operational capabilities has aided in saving a great number of lives and properties.

However, in recent times the unit has become a thorn in the flesh, not only to the populace, but to the polity, as negative reports, outcries and curses have become its regular normal innuendos. This is owing to their resort to frivolities going outside their original mandate(s) and motivated by inordinate cravings. The influence of external factors such as people with the financial muscle use their money to control some bad elements in SARS which often result to harassment or intimidation and illegal detentions, thereby, shifting away from their mandate and creation<sup>4</sup>. In addition to this are underlining issues of

extra judicial killings, torture, unlawful arrests and extortion which has contributed to making SARS a shadow of itself and a threat to the society it came to rescue.

## THE JOURNEY SO FAR

There have been several outcries on the negative reports against SARS unlawful actions against members of the public in Nigeria. In a 2016 report, Amnesty International accused SARS officers of regularly detaining young adults unlawfully and extorting money from their families. Equally, the tale of woe in the hands of SARS officers by a *twitter user* in 2017<sup>5</sup>, triggered thousands of Nigerians who in response began sharing their own similar experiences. This culminated to the #EndSARS# which has trended on social media since December 1, 2017 and the call to scrap the unit. The campaign moved from social media to the streets of Nigeria, with the campaigners threatening to go on with the protests if the government fails to scrap SARS<sup>6</sup>. In August 2018, the then Acting President and Vice President of Nigeria Professor Yemi Osinbajo ordered the Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Kpotun Idris, to urgently reorganize SARS.

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<sup>2</sup> Aminu, A. B, Salifu, U. F and Bivan, N. (2017). How, why we created SARS – EX-IGP Mike Okiro, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/how-why-we-created-sars-ex-igp-mike-okiro>.

<sup>3</sup> Idam, M. O. (2018). An Overview of the Impact of Special Anti-Robbery Squad SARS) in Nigeria, International Journal of Human Resource Studies, 8 (4) 180-187

<sup>4</sup> Idam, M. O. (2018). An Overview of the Impact of Special Anti-Robbery Squad SARS) in Nigeria, International Journal of Human Resource Studies, 8 (4) 180-187

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/nigerians-demand-police-sars-unit-171215153831230.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/271802-endsars-nigerians-resume-campaign-to-shutdown-brutal-police-squad.html>

Consequently, the Nigeria Police Force came up with efforts that may be deemed hasty culminating in; centralization with a Commissioner of Police (CP) heading FSARS, change in modus operandi, change of kitting for operatives, use of marked vehicles, ban from stop and search and restriction of operations to heinous crimes only.

Equally, a Presidential Panel on the Reform of SARS headed by the Executive Secretary National Human Rights Commission<sup>7</sup>, was set up to hear complaints of abuse of human rights, torture, extortion and incidents of extra judicial killings from Nigerians against officers and men of the SARS. The panel made up of seasoned lawyers and retired senior security officers amongst others held their sittings from August 2018 to February 2019 in Gombe, Lagos and Abuja. It indicted several Police personnel for various criminal acts and abuse of office.

A key recommendation made by the panel was that *SARS should return to performing their core functions which exclude handling non-violent cases; relating to fraud, land matters and other domestic issues*. The panel also stressed the need to hold Police personnel accountable for the use or misuse of their firearms. The



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need for capacity building of personnel in this special unit and the reorganization of the unit were also recommended. It also envisaged that the creation of state and local Police may aid a firmer control and functionality of SARS.

Despite the foregoing, the carnage was unabated. In the past three months from May-June 2019, there were reported cases of killings allegedly by SARS operatives. On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019, operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Lagos State Police Command, were reported to have shot dead a cleaner Francis Eni, 39, on Ajisegiri Street, Ilupeju, Lagos state<sup>8</sup>. On 9<sup>th</sup> August 2019, a National Union of Road Transport Worker (NURTW) driver was also claimed to have been shot by a SARS operative for trying to evade a security check point on the Abuja-Kaduna expressway, causing the aggrieved union members to block the highway. On 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019, a pregnant woman was reportedly shot and killed by a SARS operative in Ijegun area of Lagos, causing one of the officers to be lynched by an irate mob.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the image of the Force has kept nose-diving, as the Police-Civilian chasm continue to widen even with the

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.channelstv.com/2019/06/03/committee-on-sars-reforms-submits-report-to-buhari/>

<sup>8</sup> Ekpimah E. (2019). Tension as SARS Operatives allegedly Kill Cleaner in Lagos. <https://punchng.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Olalekan O. (2019). Pandemonium in Lagos As Stray Bullet Kills Pregnant Woman. <https://tribuneonlineng.com/>

various Police Public relations efforts. The urgent need for a roadmap for a cost effective feasible, sustainable and above all an efficient SARS reform is mandatory to enable the Nigeria Police not only to tackle violent criminal acts effectively, but also help redeem the present image of the Nation globally as an insecure state.

## THE WAY FORWARD

It is critical to note that over the years, many units have been created in the Force to combat other heinous crimes such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, cultism, vandalism and so on. They include the Intelligence Response Team (IRT), Anti Kidnapping (AK), Anti-Cultism Unit, Anti Car Theft, Special Tactical Squad (STS) etc. A realistic overview of their operation indicates a clear overlap or conscious deviation cum incursion, hence the duplication and lack of clear-cut focus on specialty within SARS can become an index of corruption in the Force where some officers are not concerned about combating crime or maintaining peace and order, but enriching themselves through cases<sup>10</sup>.

It may not be out of place to posit that the continued existence of SARS at this time is antithetical to not only the Police image, but also the government's



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commitment to national security to wit the yearnings of the populace. This is despite the repackaging it has undergone, which still renders it unmarketable. More so, the existence of some parallel units with duplicated mandates necessitates the recommendation for the unification of functions, to strengthen and enhance service delivery.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for the Nigeria Police Force to create a section that may be known as the **Anti Heinous Crimes Section** (AHCS) that will exist at the Federal level and be duplicated at the Zonal and State command levels. This section can take on a semi-autonomous position comparable to that of the Force Intelligence Bureau (FIB), reporting directly to the IGP with the DIG FCID playing a supervisory role. At the Federal level, it will be headed by an AIG. In the Zonal and state levels, they will be headed by a DCP and ACP respectively, while they report directly to the Zonal AIG and CP commands. The respective heads of the Zonal and State CID will also play a supervisory role.

<sup>10</sup> Onyijen K. (2019). 'The Nigeria Police of Today' culled from The Indelible Ink; a collection of Essays by

the Creative Writers' Forum, University of Benin, Benin City

The Nigeria Police will move the various violent crimes units: Intelligence Response Team (IRT), Special Tactical Squad (STS), Anti Car Theft, Anti Robbery, Anti Kidnapping, Anti Cattle Rustling and Anti Cultism etc under the AHCS. It is imperative to also state that the operational teams whose mandate is purely tactical should be separated from the investigation component to deter operatives from acts that may either compromise cases or encourage corruption.

## STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

### Mission

- i. To achieve unification of forces, assets (human/material) of existing units with similar mandates to combat heinous crimes viz; Armed Robbery, Kidnapping, Cultism, Cattle Rustling, Vandalism, etc.
- ii. To create avenue to sieve and purge these existing units of the bad eggs at the front burner of Police image devastation.
- iii. To instill a culture of accountability, efficacy and trustworthiness.
- iv. To eliminate the garbage in garbage out inherent in hitherto postings to these existing units

and entrench a culture where postings are based strictly on merit.

### Mobilization

- i. General screening/selection by a board– to consider criminal, emotional, health, addiction, motivation and other critical personality traits.
- ii. Academic suitability-Assessment via written and practical tests to ascertain qualification for subsequent capacity building courses.
- iii. Attestation of character-A referee within the force of rank not below SP for Rank/file, CSP for Inspectors and ACP to CP for SPOs.

### Command Structure for AHCU

- |             |   |        |
|-------------|---|--------|
| 1. Federal  | - | AIG    |
| 2. Zonal    | - | DCP    |
| 3. State    | - | ACP    |
| 4. Division | - | ASP-SP |

### Compulsory Basic Courses

- a) Tactical operation/PMF combat training
- b) Intelligence
- c) Citizenship/leadership (Sherry Hills Jos)

- d) Human rights
- e) Constitution
- f) Basic legal exposure(codes/acts)
- g) Counter Terrorism
- h) Explosives

### Timing of Engagement

Upon mobilization, operatives are to spend five years in the unit. Personnel with less than five (5) years to retirement may not be mobilized for the operational arm but because of experience and wealth of knowledge, may still serve in the investigating arm and other specialized technical units such as TIU, Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) and Forensics.

### Training and Retraining

In addition to the basic courses, there will be:

- I. Local and international refresher courses at least every 12 months.
- II. Capacity building seminars as often as possible.
- III. Passing prescribed course examinations to be critical to subsistence in the unit.



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issues of Payment of allowances such as hazards allowance should be captured in the Police budget.

### Fusion

The reorganization or outright overhaul of SARS must be done methodically, hence the recommendation that the status quo shall be maintained until screening, training and postings are concluded, before the official disbanding of SARS.

### CONCLUSION

The Nigeria Police as currently constituted has so much powers conferred or centered on the IGP, although by virtue of the creation of the offices of the DIG, AIG and CP, these powers are to be delegated. In practice, through financing, certain critical decision making, and postings are still the exclusive reserves of the IGP. In running the various formations of the force, most officers in charge (O/Cs) depend on the apex for their survival most especially on issues of funding. This has of course diminished the expected levels of competence and productivity in the Police.

### Kitting and Remuneration

The kitting of the officer shall be with an approved Police combat outfit and

Police Officers depend majorly on allocations from relevant political office holders to run their offices. Most state governors and local government chairpersons therefore become major benefactors to the police in terms of running costs, purchase of vehicles, communication equipment, maintenance, rehabilitation of infrastructure and so on. This creates room for interference by such benefactors that may negate efficient Police service delivery and accountability.

The powers inherent in the offices as conferred by the creating laws and pursuant to the general discharge of basic duties of Police as provided for in the constitution and domiciled in the rank provides no specific limitation to the powers of officers of and above the Commissioner rank.

It is believed that financial autonomy through sufficient and direct budgetary allocation to all formations, divisions and units of the Force and the provision for specific instruction on modality and duration of office for senior officers would surely enhance efficiency and superlative service delivery. The Legislature must ensure that the Nigeria Police budgetary system is devolved not merely on paper in the budget proposals but practically, as the Zonal, State commands and divisional

police formations cannot function optimally in securing their communities until they are given financial autonomy that must be transparent and accountable. Leaving the management of Police funds majorly at the apex will continue to diminish the desired efficacy and professionalism expected of an institution such as the Nigeria Police Force.

The effectiveness of the AHCS upon establishment to deliver on its mandate largely depends on the manner it is run; this goes to all other Police establishments. There is dire need for financial autonomy which paves way for sufficient funding. This can only be actualized through practical devolution of powers, not only in the section, but across the various arms of the Nigeria Police Force.