

Centralised Database for Effective Policing¹ among Law Enforcement Agencies²

Preamble

Does Nigeria have a PHILOSOPHY or Nature, Meaning and Purpose that serves as CONFLUENCE for Governance?

Has the Questions What is Nigeria, Whose Nigeria, What are Nigeria's issues and How can Nigeria be achieved been asked and answered?

Introduction

The imperative of a centralised database for effective policing among law enforcement agencies cannot be overemphasised. This is not only because it is part of the growing world of artificial intelligence in its increasing inroad into governance of most if not all the spheres of human life. This is in the face of the ever growing need for resources of this kind in order to effectively address, in quick time and with little exaction, the myriad of policing issues affecting numerous agencies of government at all levels. Nigeria is grappling with deteriorating law and order crisis following the perennial social crisis occasioned by the non performing economy.

The imperative of the centralised database has been several decades late. This is regardless of the appreciable progress made by several agencies in creating their autonomous databases even as there have been persistent calls for synergies and collaborations in the work of agencies in need of the resource from these databases. One of the drawbacks of the current fragmented databases is the lack of centralisation. There is therefore the need for centralisation in order for resources and intelligence to be shared amongst agencies particularly those in the law enforcement space.

The lack of centralised database has been part of the governance crisis bedvilling all facets of the socio-economic and political life in Nigeria. It is important to overcome this governance

¹ Dr. Adoyi ONOJA is a professor of African history in the Nasarawa State University, Keffi with interest and expertise in security, history of security and security studies, comparative security and security studies, governance, law enforcement, media and Middle Belt of Nigeria. He has published widely and edits a website <http://www.adoyionoja.org.ng> and can be reached on onojaa@yahoo.com. He is currently on sabbatical leave at the National Institute for Security Studies, Bwari, Nigeria.

² A paper prepared for presentation at the three day workshop on West African Police Information System (WAPIS) entitled "interagency collaboration on information sharing among law enforcement agencies in Nigeria" organised by the Ministry of Police Affairs and Nigeria Police Force at the Reiz Continental Hotel, Central Business District, Abuja, 29th – 31st October 2024

crisis in order to create the condition for the centralisation of database to enhance effective policing by law enforcement agencies.

In the outline of this presentation, there is introduction, politics, state and governance and the role they play in the crisis of governance bedvilling centralisation of database. I will look at the Central Motor Registry (CMR) and the West Africa Police Information System (WAPIS) in the contradiction they demonstrate and in the evidence they provide for the condition of governance. I will then examine the benefits of centralised database in policing amongst law enforcement agencies and draw my conclusion.

On Politics, the State and Governance

It is not possible to talk about the crisis in the data sector without talking about governance. It is also not possible to talk about governance without mentioning politics and the State. There is a relationship between politics, state and governance and thus the crisis in the database sector. The governance type in Nigeria derives from the character of politics and the state. It is politics that produces the State, while the State produces government. The politics and state in Nigeria, using Leftwich's argument, is the type that generates, sustain and protect a dependent and ineffective capacity for governance.³

The result is that governance is the dependent and ineffective type resulting in corruption or the abuse of entrusted power for private gains. Corruption engenders failure to deliver services hence the crises that generates conflicts in the polity. The trajectory of the state in Nigeria continues to deteriorate in the hands of what one analyst called the ruining class.⁴ The ruining class which came in phases has been in control of politics since the commencement of the present Republic. This explained the condition of governance and thus data governance in Nigeria.

According to Buzan,⁵ the state is a form of political organisation which transcends all other political units as standard of political legitimacy. The state dominates political legitimacy and authority and command over instruments of coercion of the civil and military, intelligence and law enforcement types. The state comprised ideas, institutions and physical body. To

³ Adrian Leftwich, "Governance, Democracy and Development in the Third World", *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3, Democratisation in the Third World, 1993: 605-624

⁴ The analyst is Dele Farotimi, a foremost critic in Nigeria

⁵ See Barry Buzan (1991), *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, London and New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf

attain political legitimacy, authority and command of the institutions of the state, the ideas of the state must be agreed upon by the occupants of a geographical area where the state operates. It is the ideas that will govern the institutions and the institutions will in turn govern the physical body.

If the state is properly constituted with the consent of most of the occupants in a geographical area, for instance Nigeria, the state becomes the soul of most Nigerians. The ideas and institutions function impartially towards meeting the expectations of most Nigerians in Nigeria. The state is the impartial and permanent organ of the country in place to enforce ideas through its institutions managed by the government at any particular period. The government is chosen by most of the people at time interval to govern the physical body using the ideas and institutions in order to achieve the ideas and ideals of the state.

What is the state in Nigeria at any given time is transient. Unlike a properly constituted state that stayed impartially and permanently committed and dedicated to attaining the ideals contained in the ideas of the state, the transient state in Nigeria required partial and complete reconstitution at the end of every administration in order to serve the new administration. The state is thus a coalition of the president, associates, parties, ethnic/religion/regions/bureaucratic and military, intelligence and law enforcement at any given time. The nature of the transient state in Nigeria makes no distinction between the state and government. The government is the state and the state is the government.

Consequently, the state in Nigeria is completely partial. The implication for governance as institutions, processes and procedures and for the World Bank as the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources⁶ for the benefit of most Nigerians is immense. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, this tendency of the state heightened since 2015 where there were several wings of the state personified by powerful individuals in the governments.

The state is central to any discourse of government and governance in Nigeria. This state is central to the extent that the state through its ideas and institutions gives effect to government and governance. The assertion by the World Bank in 1989 that behind the litanies of Africa's development problems was the crisis of governance⁷ captured the condition of politics and the state in the persistent of this crisis. The state in most sub-Saharan Africa remained the way it has been when the colonial authorities handed over power

⁶ World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington DC: The World Bank, 1989

⁷ World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth...*

to the newly minted African elites of the period. The fact that the state, in most sub-Saharan Africa, relied on juridical and not empirical sovereignty⁸ for its survival clearly testify to its illegitimacy amongst the people. Since Nigeria's major challenge is governance, the state is responsible for this challenge.

This is the condition that produces data in hands of multiple agencies engaged in different assignments without common or confluent purpose. This thus explained the lack of centralised database for the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of most Nigerians.

On the Short-lived the CMR, WAPIS, Law Enforcement and the Need for Centralised Database in Nigeria

The Central Motor Registry (CMR) and the West African Police Information System (WAPIS) represented two divergent examples of the need for database. The CMR and WAPIS exemplified the contradiction and the governance crisis confronting governments and their agencies. On the one hand, the CMR represented the persistence of fragmented database and on other hand the WAPIS presented a case for centralisation of database in order to engender law enforcement in the region.

Of the law enforcement agencies, if law enforcement is defined strictly from the perspective of the uniformed disciplined services, the police are the lead law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. It was from the womb of the police that almost all of the other law enforcement agencies emerged.

There are myriads of law enforcement agencies of the uniformed disciplined services types. They include the civil defence, the customs, the immigration, the drug agency, the quarantine service, the correctional service, the road safety, the aviation security etc. All of these agencies of the executive require data in order to be able to function in similar but slightly different work schedules. For now, most if not all of these agencies, have their individual data bases. These individualised databases overlap in most cases. They guard these data jealously and usually do not allow other agencies access to them for other agencies. This is even when they admit that no one agency can get it right and thus the need for synergies and collaborations. This tendency has engendered duplication by other agencies.

⁸ Read Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg (1986), "Sovereignty and Underdevelopment: Juridical Statehood in the African Crisis", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 24. No. 1(Mar.): 1-31

One example that stands out in the lack of centralised database and the persistence of individualised effort was the recent experiment by the Nigeria Police in the creation of a Central Motor Registry (CMR). The CMR compelled vehicle owners to register their vehicles and obtain a certificate after paying a fee. The scheme was denounced and later on put on hold.

Whatever was the philosophy of the CMR for the police, the best would have been to have a central database of vehicles from which not only the police but other agencies can always tap into in search of information for their work. Almost all the policing agencies at one point or the other would require data that has to do with vehicles and in the scheme of policing, the Road Safety should have been the agency that should create and feed this data into the centralised database should one exist.

As far as the CMR was concerned, not only did the police deploy manpower and equipment into creating data that was short-lived. There were lots of Nigerians that fell victims to the harassment by the police on the highways where they were charged huge sums of money as penalty. There were hundreds of thousands of others that logged into the site and registered without any hope of getting any refund.

The federal government recently adopted the European Union (EU) and International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) funded West African Police Information System (WAPIS) programme of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).⁹ The initiative is to boost Nigeria Police role in the effort towards dealing with issues of crimes and criminalities across countries of the region. This was an example of the push towards centralisation of data and if the Nigerian government would buy into this initiative because of its advantages, it should promote the centralisation of data in its own establishments in order to enhance efficiency and cut waste.

The WAPIS initiative, like most development agenda, would first and foremost serve the interests of the development partners – the EU and Interpol – in policing that affects their

⁹ Read "Enhancing Police Effectiveness with Infrastructural Support", https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/06/11/enhancing-effective-policing-with-infrastructural-support/#google_vignette 19:10:24

interests than it would the interests of West Africa and Nigeria. Nigeria may have key into the initiative from the point of view of its role in the region as well as its political correctness in matters of this nature.

The Benefits of Centralised Database in Law Enforcement

There are immense benefit for the country in the creation and maintenance of a centralised database for effective policing by law enforcement. The creation of this database is not only an indication of the governance of law enforcement infrastructures in Nigeria. It will become a force multiplier in all spheres of law enforcement by enhancing operational efficiency, effectiveness and decision making capabilities.¹⁰

In the first place, a centralised database would make for operational effectiveness and efficiency amongst the various law enforcement agencies in the country. This will concomitantly checkmate the insecurity confronting the country. This efficiency will manifest in the speed of access, inter agency collaboration and data exchange and in the reduction of data duplication. In the second place, it would enhance investigative effectiveness. Data in such repository would enhance search capabilities, improve crime pattern analysis through identification of trends, connections and hotspots and accelerates investigation timelines. In the third place, the existence of centralised database improves intelligence and analytical ability as it makes for predictive policing, crime forecasting and threat assessment.

In the fourth place, it makes for safety and compliance of data. To have a centralised database is to have robust encryption, support regulatory requirement, access controls and auditing. It ensures audit trails as it would be easier to track user activity for accountability. In the fifth place, there will be training and support where there is standardised procedures following consistent training and operational protocols, user support with dedicated assistance and resources and system updates with regular software enhancements and maintenance.

In the sixth place, the availability of centralised database makes for economic benefits. It is cost saving as it reduced data storage, maintenance and personnel costs. It also improves resource allocation and enhances public safety through increase efficiency and reduces crime. In the seventh place is its inoperability. There is cross agency collaboration with seamless data

¹⁰ Read the article "why centralised police databases are force multipliers" <https://www.police1.com/police-products/police-technology/police-software/articles/why-centralised-police-databases-are-force-multipliers-SMSBoEKGfWpVdDAy> accessed 23:10:24

sharing between jurisdictions. It makes for integration with other systems as it is compatible with existing infrastructure. It enhances national and international cooperation through standardised data formats. A centralised database will eliminate suspicion and rivalry amongst the Police and other Law Enforcement Agencies.

Conclusion

In the light of the need to cut the cost of governance – a fact made clear by the Orasanya Report – and to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery particularly in the law enforcement sector through policing, it is important that efforts should be geared towards creating a centralised database in Nigeria. After all, Nigeria did commend the initiative of the EU and Interpol in the creation of the WAPIS and signed into the scheme. The WAPIS would have tapped into a central database if there was one in existence. Instead the WAPIS initiative would further fragment the database infrastructure in Nigeria.

The advantages of creating and having a centralised database far outweigh the disadvantages of maintaining the present data autonomy of agencies of similar disposition in Nigeria. Of the disadvantages in this present approach is the worsening condition of law enforcement in Nigeria. This is in spite of the budgetary allocations year in year out and the abundance of supportive technical innovations in the market. The not-so-altruistic motive of the fragmented state and governance in Nigeria ensure that the fragmented data infrastructure remains as it made good business in the political economy of “security”.¹¹

¹¹ Read Adoyi Onoja, *The Making of a Political Economy of “Security” in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic* (Monograph 11), Jos, Eiwa Press, 2024