

LAWYERS ALERT AND INSTITUTIONALISING COMMUNITY POLICING AS A PEOPLE-CENTRED PUBLIC SAFETY FRAMEWORK IN NIGERIA

Introduction

People-Centred Public Safety (PCPS) is an integral component of Lawyers Alert's thematic focus on public safety, security sector governance, and access to justice. In Nigeria, public safety systems have largely been state-centric and enforcement-driven, excluding citizens from meaningful participation in shaping security outcomes. This has produced a significant trust deficit between communities and security agencies, limited responsiveness to local drivers of insecurity, and inadequate protection for vulnerable groups. In contexts such as Benue State, characterised by protracted insecurity, displacement, and communal tensions, these gaps have resulted in reactive interventions that increase human rights violations during response and fail to address root causes.

Through the People-Centred Public Safety approach, Lawyers Alert addresses these structural challenges by repositioning communities as the primary focus and active partners in achieving and sustaining safety. The initiative operationalises the community policing provisions of the *Nigeria Police Act 2020* by establishing inclusive platforms, principally Community Policing Committees (CPCs), which bring together citizens, traditional institutions, and security actors to identify risks, mediate disputes, strengthen early warning systems, and enhance accountability. This model promotes preventive, rights-based, and data-informed responses to insecurity while ensuring the inclusion of women, youth, and marginalised groups in local security governance.

Since 2022, this initiative has been operationalised in two pilot locations: Guma and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue State. After three years of implementation, the initiative reached a defining milestone: the formal adoption of the PCPS framework by the Benue State Government on 24 February 2026. This adoption marks a shift from a civil society-piloted project to a state-backed governance model that embeds community participation within formal security structures, improves coordination between government and citizens, and enables scalable, sustainable responses to insecurity.

ABOUT COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing is a policing approach mandated under Part XIV (Sections 113 to 117) of the *Nigeria Police Act 2020*. It emphasises partnership between the police and community members to prevent crime, improve public safety, and build trust. The Act mandates the establishment of Community Policing Committees at the State, Local Government, and Ward levels.

The statutory objectives of Community Policing Committees are:

- Promote partnership and cooperation between the police and members of the community.
- Encourage community participation in crime prevention and public safety.
- Enhance effective policing through community engagement and shared problem-solving.
- Improve transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the police.

Despite this clear legal mandate, Section 113 of the *Nigeria Police Act 2020* remained dormant and unimplemented across Nigeria until Lawyers Alert's deliberate activation in Benue State. This makes Lawyers Alert's implementation the first structured operationalisation of Section 113 in Nigeria, establishing a replicable model for adoption in all 36 states without requiring new legislation.

Key Interventions and Approaches

Lawyers Alert's community policing interventions are multi-layered and mutually reinforcing, grounded in evidence generation, legal activation, inclusive governance, structured capacity building, and sustained community-government engagement. The interventions described below reflect the sequenced methodology applied across the Benue State pilot.

a. Evidence Generation and Situational Analysis

The foundation of the initiative is rigorous, context-specific evidence generation. Prior to establishing any community policing infrastructure, Lawyers Alert conducted a comprehensive *Situational Analysis on Security Threats, Human Rights Violations, and Socio-Economic Disruptions in Benue State*, generating the first rights-framed security assessment of Guma and Katsina-Ala LGAs. The analysis examined the nature of security threats, governance effectiveness, socio-economic impact, and community-security relations. Findings revealed that conflicts in the project areas are largely driven by land and water resource disputes, weak boundary demarcation, poor policy enforcement, and climate-related pressures. These dynamics have

resulted in significant economic losses, food insecurity, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and widespread displacement. This evidence base has informed all subsequent programming, is publicly available as a resource for policymakers and practitioners, and is currently being updated through a new situational analysis covering Guma, Katsina-Ala, and the newly added Agatu LGA.

b. Stakeholder Engagement and Securing Buy-In

Extensive stakeholder engagements were conducted across project locations to secure buy-in and facilitate community ownership of the initiative. Key stakeholders engaged included law enforcement agencies (Nigeria Police Force, NSCDC, vigilante groups, and the Civil Protection Guard, formerly the Volunteer Guard), traditional and religious leaders, women and youth groups, local government officials, and civil society organisations. These engagements were critical to building the political will, institutional confidence, and community trust required for the model to function. They also served to identify local power structures, map potential conflict drivers, and establish the relational infrastructure on which CPC operations depend.

c. Establishment of the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee

To strengthen security sector commitment and ensure state ownership, an inclusive *Steering Committee* was established as the primary coordination and oversight body. The Steering Committee comprises Lawyers Alert, the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Benue State Peace and Reconciliation Committee, the Benue State Bureau of Homeland Security, civil society organisations, and the Benue State Civil Protection Guard. This structure was deliberately designed to recognise institutional hierarchies within the security sector and to ensure that community policing is embedded within, rather than running parallel to, formal governance processes. The Steering Committee has reinforced participatory security governance, fostered co-ownership between state actors and communities, and provided the institutional anchorage that protects the initiative from programme discontinuation.

d. Establishment of Community Policing Committees (CPCs)

Community Policing Committees were established in Guma and Katsina-Ala LGAs, each comprising 22 members democratically nominated by their communities. Membership is deliberately inclusive: traditional leaders, Nigeria Police Force representatives, NSCDC and Livestock Guard representatives, religious leaders, women's representatives, youth representatives, vigilante group members, and persons with disabilities

(PWDs) all hold formal seats. Each CPC was formally inaugurated, provided with Terms of Reference, and sworn into office, giving the committees formal standing within their respective communities and local government structures. CPCs have also secured dedicated office space within LGA Secretariats. A new CPC is currently being established in Agatu LGA.

e. **Structured Capacity Building**

Lawyers Alert designs capacity-building programmes based on a pre-intervention needs assessment of CPC members. Baseline findings revealed significant knowledge gaps: only 40% of CPC members were aware of a rights-based approach to security governance; only 35% understood the formal roles of the police; only 55% had received any training in conflict resolution; and 45% were unaware of existing security reporting channels. Capacity-building sessions delivered in response to these findings covered human rights principles in policing, community-driven security governance, early warning and early response (EWER) systems, conflict mediation and resolution, leadership and advocacy, and structured collaboration with law enforcement. A renewal capacity-building programme is currently under way, deepening skills in rights-based policing, public safety governance, accountability mechanisms, and linkages with national oversight bodies including the Police Service Commission.

f. **Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Systems**

CPCs are equipped with early warning protocols and trained to monitor, document, and report security threats through established channels. The practical impact of this system has been demonstrated in practice: in Guma LGA, the CPC's early warning communication enabled community members to alert security agencies to signals of potential violent conflict before the situation escalated, averting a confrontation. This validates the life-saving potential of community-police intelligence collaboration and confirms that communities, when properly equipped and trusted, function as the most effective early warning system available to security actors. CPCs are linked to national security sector accountability bodies, including the Police Service Commission, to ensure early warning mechanisms are embedded within a broader accountability architecture.

g. **CPC Action Planning, Dialogues, and Community Engagement**

Each CPC develops a community-owned action plan designed collaboratively with community input and updated to reflect evolving security realities. These plans serve as the operational guides through which CPCs translate community safety priorities into concrete activity. Implementation

mechanisms include radio programmes broadcasting safety messages and rights education; town hall meetings and structured dialogues with security agencies; advocacy visits to LGA Chairmen, traditional rulers, and state officials; publications and information materials targeting key community audiences; and real-time early warning communication with security sector actors. Tangible outcomes of this model include: the donation of dedicated office space within the LGA Secretariats in both Guma and Katsina-Ala; and monthly community contributions of 50 litres of premium motor spirit (PMS) to the Guma Divisional Police to support rapid response to early warning signals. Both outcomes were secured through CPC advocacy without external prompting, reflecting genuine local ownership.

h. Women's Resilience and Community Economic Empowerment

Lawyers Alert recognises that insecurity in the Middle Belt disproportionately affects women and girls, generating SGBV, displacement, economic marginalisation, and food insecurity. Alongside security governance activities, the initiative actively supports women's groups and community organisations to strengthen resilience and rebuild livelihoods disrupted by conflict. The *Sankara Mothers* platform in Katsina-Ala LGA has become a vehicle through which women lead peace dialogues within their communities. An observable return of women to marketplaces and the resumption of trade in pilot communities stand as direct indicators of improved community safety, demonstrating the inseparable connection between security governance, gender inclusion, and sustainable peace. Local NGOs, CSOs, and women's groups are supported through capacity building to work alongside CPCs in identifying and addressing security challenges through participatory approaches.

i. Government Institutionalisation and State-Level Advocacy

The initiative is explicitly designed to transition the PCPS framework from a civil society-piloted project to a government-owned governance model. On 24 February 2026, His Excellency, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Iormem Alia, Governor of Benue State, represented by the Deputy Governor, formally launched the PCPS framework as a state-wide public safety model. The Benue State Bureau of Homeland Security, led by Air Commodore Jacob Ayange Akaa Gbamwuan (Rtd.), has been designated as the lead implementing agency. This adoption creates the enabling conditions for: budget allocation for community policing structures; official directives from the Bureau of Homeland Security to all 23 LGA Chairmen to adopt and implement the framework; formalisation of CPCs within local governance structures; and the sustained institutionalisation of community participation in security governance at scale. Lawyers Alert

continues to engage state Houses of Assembly, Attorneys-General, and security authorities to embed the PCPS framework in policy, executive orders, and state budgets.

RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The following results have been recorded across the completed phases of the Benue State pilot (2022 to 2025):

- **Formal State Adoption and Institutional Buy-In:** The formal adoption of the PCPS framework by the Benue State Government on 24 February 2026 is the most significant achievement of the initiative to date. This milestone transforms a civil society pilot into an institutionalised, government-owned public safety governance model, embedding community participation within the state's formal security architecture. Community policing is now positioned as a sustainable and scalable mechanism for addressing security challenges across all 23 LGAs of Benue State. The local government chairmen of Guma and Katsina-Ala additionally contributed office space and operational resources to CPCs and security sector actors, reflecting local government ownership beyond the state level.
- **Institutionalisation of the Legal Framework:** The project's establishment of functional CPCs in Benue State constitutes the first deliberate activation of Section 113 of the *Nigeria Police Act 2020* in Nigeria. This legal milestone institutionalises the right of communities to participate in security governance and creates a replicable precedent for national adoption. Community policing is no longer a dormant statutory provision; it is now a functioning governance structure with state backing.
- **Restored Community-Police Trust and Improved Collaboration:** Through the CPC structure, there has been a marked and measurable improvement in trust and collaboration between local communities and formal security agencies. This strengthened relationship has led to better intelligence gathering, more effective conflict prevention, and a shared sense of co-responsibility for maintaining peace and security. The early conflict aversion in Guma LGA, where a CPC early warning prevented escalation, stands as the clearest practical demonstration of this outcome.
- **Enhanced Inclusion of Women, Youth, and Vulnerable Groups:** The initiative has measurably broadened participation in security governance. Twenty-five women and youth are now actively participating in traditional

council meetings from which they were previously excluded. The Youth Leader in Katsina-Ala LGA was elected CPC Chairperson, a first for community security governance in the area. Women, youth, and persons with disabilities hold formal representation in both CPCs, and women are leading peace dialogues through the Sankara Mothers platform in Katsina-Ala.

- **Improved Community Safety and Livelihood Recovery:** Communities in Guma and Katsina-Ala have reported a noticeable reduction in petty theft, robberies, and low-level crime. Community perception data and qualitative reporting from CPC members consistently indicate improved safety conditions. Initial signs of economic recovery include the gradual return of women to marketplaces, the cautious resumption of trade, and the rebuilding of livelihoods disrupted by conflict, reflecting the direct connection between improved safety and economic restoration.

PROGRESS AND WAY FORWARD

The initiative is currently active across several fronts, building on the gains of the pilot phase while expanding reach and deepening implementation.

Current progress includes the following:

1. A comprehensive situational analysis and baseline study is under way across Guma, Katsina-Ala, and Agatu LGAs to establish quantitative indicators for rigorous impact evaluation, covering conflict frequency, community trust in security agencies, women and youth participation rates, and economic recovery indicators.
2. A new CPC is being established in Agatu LGA, applying lessons from Guma and Katsina-Ala. Stakeholder mapping, community sensitisation, and CPC formation are in progress.
3. CPC action plans in Guma and Katsina-Ala are being comprehensively reviewed and updated to reflect current security realities and align with the broadened PCPS approach.
4. A renewal capacity-building programme is ongoing, equipping CPC members with advanced skills in rights-based policing, public safety governance, accountability, and relationship-building with security agencies and national oversight bodies.
5. Replication in Bayelsa State is under way through a partnership with Spaces for Change, demonstrating the framework's portability beyond Benue State.
6. Confidential reporting channels linking CPCs to the Police Service Commission for misconduct reporting are being established, alongside

structured monitoring and evaluation systems with regular reflection meetings.

Going forward, Lawyers Alert's efforts are directed toward the following priorities:

7. Deepen institutionalisation of the PCPS framework within Benue State.
8. Pursue replication across conflict-affected Middle Belt states, including Niger, Nassarawa, Plateau, Kogi, Kwara, Kaduna, and Taraba, where the shared profile of violence makes the model both urgent and directly applicable.
9. Advocate at the national level for the PCPS model to be adopted as a federal template for the implementation of Section 113 across all 36 states, working with the Nigeria Police Force, the Police Service Commission, and the National Assembly.
10. Strengthen gender-responsive programming, women's economic empowerment, SGBV prevention, and livelihoods support into the community safety framework.
11. Consolidate the accountability architecture by formalising CPC linkages to oversight bodies, institutionalising monitoring and evaluation systems, and embedding feedback loops between community-level data and state security decision-making.

Media and Publications

The following publications, documentaries, and news reports document key milestones of the initiative:

Documentaries and Video

Security Sector Accountability to Citizens in Benue State: A Documentary: <https://youtu.be/3oOVLIUbBic>

Insecurity: Lawyers Alert Inaugurates Community Policing Committee in Benue: <https://youtu.be/iFSUiBZSL7o>

CPC Inauguration Ceremony: <https://fb.watch/yEd2SW183U/>

State Government Adoption and Programme Launch

Premium Times: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/859351-benue-launches-people-centred-security-model-amid-lingering-challenges.html>

City Post: <https://www.citypost.ng/benue-govt-unveils-people-centred-public-safety-programme-reaffirms-commitment-to-peace-and-security/>

TMS News: <https://tmsnews.ng/benue-govt-launches-people-centered-public-safety-program-pledges-commitment-to-peace-safety/>

The Sun: <https://thesun.ng/benue-govt-launches-people-centered-public-safety-program-in-pursuit-of-peace-security/>

Daily Trust: <https://dailytrust.com/benue-adopts-community-policing-to-tackle-insecurity/>

Community Policing in Practice

The Nation: <https://thenationonlineng.net/residents-embrace-community-policing-in-benue/>

The Eagle Online: <https://theeagleonline.com.ng/guma-lg-donates-office-facility-to-community-police-project/>

News Now Online: <https://newsnowonline.com.ng/2024/04/29/guma-lg-donates-office-facility-to-community-police-project-in-benue/>

News Express:
https://newsexpressngr.com/api/news_detail.php?id=224641&title=guma-lg-donate-office-facility-to-community-police-project

Prompt News Online: <https://promptnewsonline.com/guma-lg-donate-office-facility-to-community-police-project-in-benue/>

Research and Reports

Situational Analysis on Security Threats, Human Rights Violations, and Socio-Economic Disruptions in Benue State (Lawyers Alert):
https://www.lawyersalertng.org/_files/ugd/644c10_c2544903efb14171a97bb5efb689885f.pdf

Conclusion

The adoption of the People-Centred Public Safety framework by the Benue State Government marks a defining achievement in Lawyers Alert's community policing initiative. It signifies that PCPS is no longer a pilot initiative dependent on civil society and donor support; it is now a state-backed governance framework that integrates community participation into security decision-making and response systems. This creates concrete opportunities for the model to be replicated across all 23 LGAs of Benue State and beyond.

Grounded in legal activation through the *Nigeria Police Act 2020*, evidence-based programming, inclusive governance, structured capacity building, and sustained community-government collaboration, Lawyers Alert's community policing

initiative has delivered transformative and documented results. Each intervention reinforces the others, creating coherence across law, practice, policy, and community action.

People-Centred Public Safety is an evolving governance framework anchored in law, driven by communities, and sustained through partnership between citizens, government institutions, and security agencies. Through this collaborative approach, the initiative contributes to building a safer, more resilient, and more accountable public safety system, first in Benue State, and progressively across Nigeria.

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