

# **Revamping the Roles of Non-State Policing Actors: An appraisal of KAROTA in Kano Metropolis**

**Timothy Zakimayu BARJE  
& Abdussalam Umar ABEDO**

## **Abstract**

*The challenges of everyday policing in a large commercial city like Kano makes it expedient for the state government to consider alternative solutions using non-state policing actors in maintaining law and order. The popularity of non-state policing actors is fast becoming acceptable even amongst state governors who exploit the opportunity to establish those using state laws for specific functions. By looking at the establishment and activities of the Kano Roads and Transport Agency (KAROTA), this research aims to examine how non-state policing groups are instrumental in maintaining law and order within the Kano metropolis. Being residents of Kano when KAROTA was newly established, the authors relieved some of their experiences in writing the research, coupled with interviews conducted with other residents, agents and administrators of the agency and some newspaper reports. It concludes that with proper handling some of the negative tendencies of KAROTA can be corrected and the agency aligned for greater services.*

## **Introduction**

Policing is not restricted to a single state structure, established and controlled by recognised authorities, which has the sole function to maintain law and order by apprehending and punishing offenders. Policing is measures and actions taken by a variety of institutions and groups (both formal and informal) in the society to regulate social relations and practices in order to secure the safety of members of the community (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2003). In other words, actions that are meant or targeted towards public peace and order and rendering assistance and service to all citizens, which may be done by

an organised group of persons, who are either recognised or not recognised by the law are considered as policing. Hence, the term is not strictly associated with the police institution alone, the concept is broadened to embrace the entire process of social regulation that governs everyday living (Baker, 2003).

The concept of non-state actors is said to have gained currency worldwide in the past couple of decades (Ulimwengu, 2007), and in Nigeria, there has been the proliferation of several non-state actors providing policing services that cut across different sectors of the society and most of these actors are operating with little or no backing from the law. Baker (2010) defines non-state policing as a wide range of local collectives providing everyday policing which could include associations, non-government organisations, informal levels of government agencies, ethnic associations, etc. However, amid the various non-state groups operating and fully functioning in the security and justice system of the nation, there are those who receive some form of legal backing from the authorities at the state level. The fact that they are considered here as non-state is attributed to the fact that federal laws do not permit them to perform police functions. This has remained a subject of controversy between the states and the federal government in Nigeria over the legitimacy of the establishment of these groups backed by the state's legislative laws.

The establishment of these groups by state governors have always been greeted with some form of controversies, even though the discussion in this article is not within the purview of such controversies. Despite the many controversies generated by the creation of these groups, it remains to be argued whether they have contributed negatively or positively to the policing landscape of the country. Some of these non-state policing groups are established for security purposes in curtailing crime and nefarious activities. These include Operation Rainbow in Plateau State (Barje, 2016), Bakassi Boys in the east, the newly established Amotekun in the south-western states, etc. Some others are meant to serve religious purposes as a kind of moral police in the society like the Hisba corps in some of the northern states. Others are meant to complement the police in patrols and community watch such as the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN). Some of these established groups like the Lagos State Traffic

Management Authority (LASTMA) and the Kaduna State Traffic Law Enforcement Agency (KASTLEA) are responsible for regulating traffic and maintaining law and order by motorists and other road users. Given this background, the research intends to study the establishment and the operation of a similar group established by the Kano State Government, the Kano Roads and Traffic Agency (KAROTA). It intends to examine the establishment of the agency and the impacts of its activities in the Kano metropolis.

### **The Establishment of KAROTA**

KAROTA was established by an act of the Kano State House of Assembly titled “A Law to provide for the regulation, control and management of traffic in the state.” It is known as the Kano State Law No 12 of 2012 signed into law on the 16th of May 2012 by former governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso (the Kano State of Nigeria, 2012). The agents popularly known as the *yan karota* have, within a short, period created a huge imprint on the people living in metropolitan Kano where they operate. Kano is known for its notorious traffic gridlocks and long traffic queues due to several factors that include: population, narrow roads, crowded intersections and roundabouts, reckless disregard for traffic rules and the limited number of police and traffic wardens to handle the huge demand for traffic control in the city. The state government decided to establish an agency to check the growing number of traffic offenders and the inability of some agencies responsible for traffic control to effectively manage the situation (Zarewa, 2016). The shortage of policemen in Kano made Kwankwaso’s administration establish the agency, having observed that there were only 8,000 policemen in Kano, as of 2015, while Kaduna and Lagos have 13,000 and 30,000 policemen respectively (Mudashir, 2015).

KAROTA was formed in Kano to help control and maintain healthy traffic and to ensure that all road users, especially transport owners both private and commercial, obey the traffic laws. The state government has strategically empowered KAROTA to arrest and fine defaulters to generate revenue for the state. Towards this end, the agency was established with the mandate to generate about N100 million monthly for the state government (Askira, 2015), a target

which many believed became one of the driving forces for their strictness, notoriety and corruption. The agency has a dual mandate of being traffic police and revenue generators (Zarewa, 2016).

### ***Organisation and Operations***

To meet its dual function of serving as traffic/road police and revenue-generating agency for the state government, KAROTA was well-positioned by the laws establishing the agency to meet its objectives. Though KAROTA was established with some policing functions attached to the agency, the Director of Administration in the agency pointed that it operates a 'purely civil service structure' when it comes to administration, grading of the staff or agents, disciplinary actions and other matters (Abdullahi, 2016). KAROTA was established as an agency under the State Ministry of Works and some of its requisition has to go through the Commissioner of Works in the state. The basic function that makes KAROTA act within the ambit of policing functions is in terms of its operations and patrols where the agents were empowered by the law to carry out arrests of persons who break traffic rules and regulations.

At the head of the agency is the Managing Director (MD) who is also the Chief Executive Officer. Four officers are answerable to him. These are the Legal Adviser/Secretary, Public Relations Officer, Internal Auditor and Intelligence Officer. Next to the MD are three Directors: Administration and General Services, Operations and Revenue. These are the top principal officers. But the operation of the agents in the field of duty is the responsibility of the Director of Operations. The officers or agents are graded on salary levels as obtained in the state civil service but their titles matched their duties as road traffic agents. The lowest cadre on Grade Level (GL) 02–06 is the Road Traffic Attendant (RTA), with Primary School Certificate as the minimum qualification needed for the position. Next is the Road Traffic Assistant from Grade 1–5 who are placed on GL 03–07 and the minimum qualification for the position is an SSCE Certificate. The Road Traffic Superintendent cadre has those on GL 06–14 with the minimum entry requirement being a Diploma/National Certificate of Education (NCE) certificate. Finally, there is the Road Traffic

Officer cadre on GL 08–16 with the minimum entry requirement of a Bachelor’s degree or HND.

There are about 94 traffic offences with their fines listed in the laws establishing KAROTA and since the agents do not have the right to prosecute offenders, a magistrate court was established mainly for KAROTA within the office complex in Kano. It is the same traffic laws and operational methods used by the Nigeria Police traffic warden that was adopted for use in KAROTA laws (Zarewa, 2016). Offenders who resist arrests or refuse to own up to their offences when arrested by KAROTA are the ones usually taken to the court. There are two categories of offenders: those who accept their faults and pay the fine when arrested and those who object to their arrest and are charged to the court (Zarewa, 2016). The court sits twice weekly.

Two units are established under the Director of Operations that are responsible for ensuring orderliness on the road and compliance with traffic rules. These are the Enforcement Unit and the Traffic Control Unit. The traffic control unit is responsible for controlling traffic within Kano city; agents in the units are posted to junctions, roundabouts, intersections and places where there are traffic lights. Their duties are to ensure that motorists and other road users obey the traffic lights and to ensure that there is a smooth flow of traffic at the major traffic grid points in the city. In the city, one could see KAROTA agents on almost every roundabouts, junction and intersection. Their presence is remarkable and, to a very large extent, they have succeeded in ensuring that the traffic gridlock Kano was known for has been reduced to a considerable extent. Motorists in Kano are careful to observe the lines at every traffic point and are cautious in observing the traffic lights due to the presence of KAROTA who are often swift to arrest those who default by crossing the traffic lines unduly. Others who make ‘U’ turns where it is illegal are also apprehended by the agents. The Enforcement Unit has some of the heavier tasks and its duties include patrolling the city to ensure that motorists and trucks do not park at the wrong places; when they do, they are towed to the office yard until the defaulters pay their fines. In Kano, there is a proliferation of illegal Motor Parks and some are located right on the streets in the busiest sections.

Aside from creating a traffic gridlock where such parks are located, some of these parks are managed by louts, touts, area boys or street thugs who for a small token from drivers, help to get passengers aboard the commercial vehicles. Members of the public often prefer to patronise these illegal roadside Motor Parks because they are quick and are free from the hassle experienced when they go to the government control Motor Parks or the government-approved ones (Sodangi, 2016). The negative side of allowing these illegal parks to exist has to do with encouraging touts' activities and violence that usually characterise such parks. There is also an issue with the safety of the passengers because most of the commercial drivers who are popularly known as *yan gada-gada* are not registered with the recognised Road Transport Union. Rather, they are private. Unfortunately, some of these private commercial vehicles are usually driven by criminals who end up robbing passengers along the way or kidnapping them for ritual and sexual abuse.

In order to curb the issue of illegal motor parks, KAROTA in collaboration with the Road Transport Union produced a 'Manifest' which is a form given to every commercial driver that uses the approved motor parks. The form contains information about every passenger aboard the vehicle. Passenger's information on the manifest includes passenger's name, address of departure, address on arrival, phone number of next of kin and passenger's phone number. The form also has the vehicle number and the type of car. The Vehicle Manifest, according to the Director of Operations, serves two purposes: The first has to do with the welfare of the passengers. Information provided on the manifest ensures that passengers are easily contacted in case they forget luggage in the car, and their relatives are easily reached in case of emergency. The second purpose is to ensure that illegal commercial drivers, who carry passengers from illegal motor parks are identified.

### ***Some Achievements of the Agency***

Part of the duty of the Enforcement Unit is to arrest drivers and vehicles that do not have the Manifest, especially those plying interstate routes and longer routes to Local Government areas distant from the city. Some major Motor Parks that are known to be approved by the government in the city are Kano Line, now popularly known as

KAROTA Park, Unguwa Uku Motor Park, etc. The places known to be notorious for illegal motor parks are Gyadi-Gyadi Fly Over, just before Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Hotoro Roundabout and Dan Marke. These are strategic locations because they are on inter-state roads, especially on the busy Zaria Road that leads to Kaduna, Abuja, North Central States and the South; while the busy Kano-Maiduguri road links Kano to the entire North Eastern States. Commercial drivers who default on these rules are mostly found on the Kano–Zaria road and places around Hotoro and its roundabout because it is the only link to the Kano–Maiduguri road. Daily one could see the KAROTA enforcement team patrolling the city in their Hilux pickup truck and around various intersections and round-about.

The Enforcement Unit is also saddled with the responsibility of arresting street traders hawking their wares at major junctions and traffic spots in the city. These street hawkers constitute serious problems on traffic holdups where they use the opportunity to hawk their wares when the traffic light stops vehicles. KAROTA also arrests animals that stray on the streets in the city. Staff from the Livestock Unit, from the Ministry of Agriculture in the state, is assigned to the agency and is responsible for handling animals that are arrested while straying on the roads and the streets. Owners who come for claims have to pay a fine and also pay a fee of N100 per day for the number of days the animal spends in detention (Chiranchi, 2016).

For many in the city, KAROTA has done a wonderful job in ensuring that traffic laws are obeyed in Kano. The streets are unburdened with the usual clutter that characterised major roads of the metropolis due to the presence of KAROTA agents. When KAROTA was first established there was an awe and aura of fear that pervaded the city due to the activities of the agents. Many attributed the boldness of KAROTA to the support they received from the former Governor, Kwankwaso who was said to have given them limitless powers through his utterances. Perhaps the support they got from the governor was part of the reason they eventually became very unpopular and a sore to the people of the city. KAROTA has demonstrated its dedication to service delivery in the state in various areas. For instance, when there were fire outbreaks in Singer market and Sabon Gari market, KAROTA were on hand with the other

security agencies in the state to offer their assistance in ensuring the control of traffic in the affected areas, and to check looters, who came with vehicles in the guise of shop owners to evacuate goods from stores that do not belong to them (Chiranchi, 2016).

One of the major achievements that KAROTA recorded, with support from other security agencies like the police, is ensuring that the ban on commercial motorcycle operators in Kano was achieved and complied with. For many dwellers of the city, it was almost unimaginable to believe that the city of Kano would be free from the activities of commercial motorcycle operators known popularly as *acaba*. For the records, it was believed, though without any official records, that Kano city, before the ban on *acaba* in 2013, used to have the highest number of commercial motorcycle operators in the country with an estimated number of riders put between 1 million and 2 million unregulated cyclists who competed for the road with cars, buses, lorries and tricycles (Hills, 2012). Before the suspension of the motorcyclists in 2012, they have been accused of being used to perpetrate evil in the city. With the outbreak of Boko Haram activities in the city, there was an increase in attacks in the city by members of the sect, especially those who use bikes to attack innocent citizens. It was believed that the commercial motorcyclists were either assisting them or the sect members disguised themselves under the cover of being legitimate *acaba* operators. The attacks through the use of motorcycles were brought to a climax when on 19 January 2013 the late emir of Kano, Ado Bayero was attacked by bike-riding gunmen, who killed six persons and wounded several others including Bayero's two sons. This attack was believed to have given the Kano state government enough reason to impose a ban on commercial and private motorcycle use in Kano.

On 21 January 2013, the government announced a ban on motorcycle operations in the state, in a broadcast presented by the then deputy governor, Abdullahi Ganduje. The ban took effect on 24 January 2013. The ban prohibits any form of commercial motorcycle operation in the state and permits only single riders on private motorcycles without a passenger even if it is a relative. KAROTA and other agencies were instrumental in ensuring that commercial and private motorcycles owners complied with the ban. KAROTA agents



were stationed in strategic traffic locations in the city to ensure that the ban is effective. The ban has been successfully sustained as the only riders of motorcycles seen within the city are private motorcycle owners.

### ***Challenges and Limitations***

With the seeming success recorded by KAROTA, it is obvious for anyone living in Kano to say that KAROTA is probably the most despised and dreaded law enforcement agency in Kano at the peak of their operations between 2012 and 2014. Consisting mainly of street boys who are mostly illiterates, the agents eventually evolved to be oppressive and excessively officious in carrying out their duties. Their excesses led to a situation in which residents within Kano city preferred to fall into the hands of the police than to be arrested by members of KAROTA for traffic offences. Their popularity in the city was mainly stemmed not out of appreciation for their duties but their oppressive and corrupt practices. There is no doubt about these, as the agency administrators consider the establishment of mutual and cordial relations between the agents and members of the public as one of its greatest challenges (Zarewa, 2016). They admitted that the relationship has not been cordial and this made them embark on a sensitisation campaign to rebrand the agency.

The foundation that was laid for the kick-off of KAROTA was largely faulty due to the way and manner the state government embarked on the recruitment and empowerment of the agency. A lot of Kano inhabitants have blamed former Governor Rabiu Kwankwaso for instigating violence in the actions of KAROTA due to some of his utterances. For instance, the governor was quoted to have said “it is better to offend me than to offend the KAROTA officials;” it was again alleged that it was at his behest that the agents are extorting anyone who spoke in the English language to them ₦5,000. (Mudashir, 2014). At the initial stage, the KAROTA was first seen as a kind of police force owned by the state government and specially created by Kwankwaso as a means to intimidate his political opponent. The whole idea of creating a force like KAROTA could be seen at the inauguration of Kwankwaso as the executive governor of Kano where the presence of some kind of security guards were seen

during the swearing-in ceremony in 2011. Shortly after the swearing-in, people in the state accused the state governor of trying to float a ‘private army’ of men without any legal backing, known as *askarawan Kwankwasiya*, as their presence was said to be noticed in government functions and major events in the state (Mohammed, 2011). They were seen kitted in white on a green uniform with the symbolic red cap known as the trademark for *Kwankwasiya*– a term synonymous with the political movement that promotes Kwankwaso’s idea of good governance.

When eventually the law establishing KAROTA was passed in 2012, it was believed that the majority of the about 1,600 men employed as Road Traffic Attendants were illiterates, and mostly street touts. The choice of this category of youths was first to intimidate and exploit their fearless nature to ensure that motorists and road users are cowed into obeying the traffic laws since these thug-like agents are ready to use force if possible. Some are even accused of being drug addicts as they could be seen at the side of the road smoking substances. Their illiteracy was exploited by the government to minimise the cost of hiring well-educated agents. As much as the motive to provide gainful employment for these street urchins is commendable, the negative impact the choice of these agents created outweighed the benefits.

While noting the problem, the agency expressed the desire to change the status quo by filling the vacancies for other ranks in the agency with educated personnel. Though provision was made in the law establishing the KAROTA for cadres of rank that would accommodate qualifications above primary and secondary certificate holders, it is evident that of the over 1,610 Traffic Agents in KAROTA, over 95 per cent of them were placed between grade level 2 and 7 as mainly Road Traffic Attendants and Road Traffic Assistants (Kano Road Traffic, 2015). That is why of the over 90 traffic law offences enshrined in the law establishing KAROTA, the agents are known only to enforce less than five of these laws (such as crossing the line at a traffic stop, illegal parking, overloading and lack of manifest) because most of them could neither read nor write (Zarewa, 2016).

**Table 1** KAROTA Agents Ranking and Grades

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Grade Level (GL)</b>
<b>Road Traffic Attendant</b> Road Traffic Attendant Grade II Road Traffic Attendant Grade I Snr. Road Traffic Attendant Head Road Traffic Attendant Chief Road Traffic Attendant	Primary School Certificate	GL 02-06
<b>Road Traffic Assistant</b> Road Traffic Assistant Grade II Road Traffic Assistant Grade I Snr. Road Traffic Assistant Head Road Traffic Assistant Chief Road Traffic Assistant	Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE)	GL 03-07
<b>Road Traffic Superintendent</b> Assistant Road Traffic Supt. Snr. Road Traffic Supt. Head Road Traffic Supt. Chief Road Traffic Supt.	Diploma/NCE	GL 06-09
<b>Road Traffic Officers</b> Terminates at Director Road Traffic	Bachelor's Degree/HND	GL 08-16

The poor choices made by the government in selecting these policing agents have a lot of negative effects. At the peak of their operation in 2013/2014, KAROTA agents brazenly flaunt their illiteracy with an irking pride, as they charge motorists and other road users an extra fine of ₦5, 000 for speaking English to them instead of Hausa when arrested for breaking a traffic law. For visitors in the state and other non-Hausa speaking inhabitants of the city as well as educated elites, this was considered as the height of impunity and harassment by KAROTA agents. Secondly in their drive to ensure that all commercial taxi drivers and buses pick passengers from the legal motor parks by checking the manifests, KAROTA agents have harassed a lot of innocent commercial drivers who usually come into the city with traders and other business people to purchase the merchandise for their businesses in Kano. Often, not knowing the law in place, they fall victims to KAROTA agents who make them pay fines as much as ₦50,000 and above for not having their manifest

from the motor parks they picked passengers in their states, or for ignorantly dropping a passenger or parking their vehicles in the NO PARKING area marked by KAROTA (Abubakar, 2016).

Some traders in the Kwari market and Singer market when asked about the activities of KAROTA complained that when KAROTA was first launched in the first two years, their clients complained that it was hard to get commercial drivers to come to the market to carry merchandise for them due to the harassment they received from agents of KAROTA (Inuwa, 2016; Mubarak, 2016). Because of the fear of KAROTA, several commercial drivers who come to Kano opt to drop their passengers at the gate of the city on the first fly-over bridge when approaching the city on the Kano–Zaria road rather than proceeding into the city. As a result of the fear created by the agents, louts and street thugs used the opportunity to make money out of commercial drivers. The drivers and some of these street louts evolved a system of ‘swap-driving;’ these louts believed that they can out-manoeuvre KAROTA patrol vans by avoiding arrest and attacking the agents when the need arises since they believe KAROTA agents are street thugs like them. What obtained then was a situation in which, from Coca Cola depot and the areas before the Kwankwasiya Housing Estates, one would find these young men waiting for commercial drivers coming into the city by the roadside where they take-over the steering, while the drivers disembark. These swapped drivers who are ready to drive recklessly to avoid the KAROTA are willing to take passengers and drop them in any part of the city.

At the same time, after dropping the passengers in designated spots in the city, they pick up new passengers along the road and at illegal parks across the city and drive them to the outskirts of the city where the original vehicle owners/drivers are waiting for them. Thus, it became common in Kano city to see KAROTA patrol vans chasing vehicles who have either dropped or picked a passenger at the wrong spots or who had committed one offence or the other, and those chased are usually the swap-drivers who believed that they have driving skills to avoid getting stopped by the KAROTA at the expense of the life of the passengers. Scenes from Hollywood flicks are almost recreated in the streets of Kano, with the KAROTA chasing these driving

miscreants like in a James Bond movie (Paul, 2016). It is on record that KAROTA, in 2013, while chasing a golf car carrying eight passengers for violating a traffic rule caused the vehicle to somersault while trying to evade KAROTA, killing some of its occupants along the Kano–Maiduguri road near Mariri (Mudashir, 2014).

Because of the way and manner, the agents were handling the situation, some thugs and street louts began to take over the operation of illegal motor parks especially those that operate on the roadside along busy intersections in places like Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital roundabout and Gyadi-Gyadi. KAROTA officials have clashed with these thugs forcing them to embark on such patrols with the support of the mobile policemen. At a point, KAROTA agents could be seen carrying sticks and cudgels at some roundabouts and intersections because they have become targets of attack by angry motorists and their notorious touts in the illegal commercial motor parks across the city (Chiranchi, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The challenge remains for the agency to evolve a strategy in addressing some of the pressing needs and challenges facing it. As much as the agency has achieved remarkable success in restoring some appreciable level of sanity in the roads within the city, the unprofessional conduct of its agents remains a thing of concern to the citizens. At a point, it was alleged that the agents were driven into a frenzy to excessively fine motorists and arrest them indiscriminately because they were not in the state government payroll and were only paid out of the total money the agency was able to generate at the end of the month. This was said to have driven them into corrupt practices of excessive charges and collecting bribes from defaulting motorists who may not want to be taken or charged to KAROTA's office. Obviously dissatisfied by the abuses of KAROTA agents, the citizens have written a series of petitions to the state government and the Kano State Anti-Corruption Commission. This prompted the state governor, Abdullahi Ganduje, in July 2015 to direct the Commission to probe the activities of KAROTA under the Kwankwaso's administration. It was discovered that massive corruption was going in KAROTA as fake receipts were issued to motorists, and huge sums of money were

traced to the private accounts of the management staff who had acquired choice properties (Ahmad, 2015).

Agencies under a government that carry out policing functions need to be more civil in approach and operations, but excesses make them unwanted in public spaces. In a country like Nigeria, where there are huge challenges regarding the Nigeria Police and Human Rights abuses, it remains a huge task for non-state policing actors and their establishing components to ensure that civility and proper handling of the civilian population becomes a major policy. Overall, the benefits of non-state policing actors in assisting the conventional police forces and government in ensuring that citizens obey the law and respect its institution cannot be underemphasised.

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