

Effective Policing Through Community Engagement

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ABSTRACT: *The process of community engagement is a critical component of any effective policing initiative. It requires that various key players work closely to develop effective programs and initiatives to govern their operations. Effective engagement is more than organizing a meeting with community members. It is a rigorous process that demands sensitivity and careful planning and execution. Any haphazard approach to police-community engagement can be more damaging. Engaging with the public offers police officers opportunities to enhance their situational awareness about what is happening in communities and improve their understanding of dynamics, risk perceptions and concerns within communities. This can then serve as a basis for informed and more effective policing. It also highlight their presence in communities, which can, in itself, both provide reassurance to the public and prevent or disrupt crime as well as help identify critical situations at an early stage in communities and refer them to relevant partners (OSCE, 2014). Engagement also helps disseminate information and key messages to the public, including dispelling misperceptions and rumours. It helps raise awareness of relevant issues and mobilize members of the public in support of addressing them. It also build trusting and mutually respectful relationships as a basis for further co-operation and develop arrangements to ensure public participation and co-operate with communities in solving problems, including addressing critical situations.*

KEYWORDS: *Community Policing, Counterterrorism, Engagement, Policing Approaches, Programs*

Date of Submission: 07-06-2020

Date of Acceptance: 22-06-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

Achieving community based initiatives requires that all stakeholders engage to develop effective programs and initiatives. On their part, the police should choose groups they engage with carefully. OSCE (2014) explains that police engagement with the public should be inclusive, reaching out to all communities and to a cross section of members within communities, including at the grass-roots level. The police should be careful not to engage only with particular groups, self-proclaimed community representatives or only with interlocutors sympathetic to them. They should strive to engage with individuals all individuals that are helpful in the execution of their mandate.

The police should take great care in establishing partnerships with individuals, groups or organizations when there is evidence that these individuals or groups are not explicitly committed to non-violence and respect for universal human rights. The short- and long-term benefits and risks should be properly assessed to decide how much the police should support and empower such individuals, groups or organizations, and for which purpose. For instance, while they might be effective partners in accessing individuals at risk of crime and drawing them away from such a path, they might also hold and impart views that are ambiguous towards, or at odds with, human rights and enhancing social cohesion.

Some forms of co-operation, such as the sharing of sensitive information, may require the police limit their engagement to trusted members of the public, such as individuals who have undergone security vetting, and the police should also take into account the risk that engaging with individuals may be perceived as co-opting or legitimizing these individuals. The police should be careful not to undermine the perceived independence and credibility of those individuals in a position to exercise a positive influence within communities and support terrorism-prevention efforts. Conversely, the police should be careful not to legitimize individuals whose influence within communities is unclear, or possibly negative, in relation to curbing crime (Deflem, 2010).

All engagements should be customized to the specific person, group or community engaged to be more effective. This may include careful choice of time, venue and words to show sensitivity and to best frame and raise the issue. It should also address both the concerns of the police and those of communities, and not one sided (OSCE, 2014). Such engagements should also be as regular as possible and conducted both in formal and informal settings to maximize opportunities for communicating, building mutual understanding and trust, and exchanging information and intelligence.

Community-based policing as a form of engagement requires police departments to organize their management, structure, personnel, and information systems in a manner that supports partnerships with advocates and other community members and proactive problem-solving focused on survivor safety. According to Ruteere&Pommerolle (2003), the concept of community policing is based on the principle of coordination and consultation between the police and the policed, on the definition of security needs and on the implementation of ways of preventing and curbing crimes and of enhancing safety. The concept is often said to have its origins in an article by two American scholars named James Wilson and George Kelling. They argued that decaying neighbourhoods bred crime and disorder hence to prevent crime, disorder had to be contained.

In Kenya, the relationship between the police and the public has been shaped by the historical beginnings where the colonial government used the police to intimidate the civilian population. Before the new constitution and emergence of the new reforms momentum, the police was perceived as being coercive and servicing the interests of the political and elite classes in the society. There was no cooperation between the police and the citizens thus the culture of lack of trust and cooperation (Lambertus and Yakimchuk, 2007). In many parts of the country, there is bad blood between the police and ordinary population hence citizens believe that cooperation with the police is a betrayal of their fellow citizens and as such it is not welcomed in the community. This is however changing.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed survey research design which entailed the use of *ex post facto* design employing mixed method approach in data collection and analysis. Observation, questionnaires, FGDs and interview schedules were employed. Quantitative and qualitative analysis was done with information from secondary data and holding interviews with key informants. A review of policing documents and reports was carried out for a comprehensive understanding of the topical issue and clarification of intricate areas arising from the research. The study was conducted in Lamu County, Kenya. It is located in the northern coast of Kenya. Lamu County is also the home to the expansive Boni forest which covers about 1,339 square kilometres and stretches to Somali, where *Al-Shabaab* terrorist has established their cell and operation base that they use to train and launch attacks in Kenya (Fergusson, 2013).

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling method. In this study, the target population were 1900 officers of the NPS in Lamu County. These officers work in police stations, police posts, camps and operational bases and are currently engaged in counterterrorism operation *Linda Boni*. Additionally, data was obtained from 35 council of elders, administrators (23 chiefs and 1 county commissioner), and 54 religious leaders affected by terrorism and other forms of crime and purposively chosen. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to draw respondents from the NPS target population. The researcher then used simple random sampling to pick 189 officers of Other Ranks and Members of Inspectorate who together form a huge chunk of the NPS population. They were subjected to questionnaires. Gazetted Officers, who were 12 in number, were purposively sampled and were subjected to interview schedule.

For administrators (county commissioner and chiefs), council of elders, religious leaders and gazetted officers, purposive sampling was applied to select the sample size for each case. Since they were fewer in number and crucial for the study result, total population in each case was sampled for the study. Whereas religious leaders and council of elders were subjected to focus group discussion, gazetted officers of the NPS, county commissioner and chiefs were subjected to interview schedules. The researcher used available data in literature to examine crime trend and cases of terrorism in Lamu County. The documents included police and judicial records, published research and reports addressing security situation in Lamu County during the period under review and journals on policing. Quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were used to transform data into the required information in line with the research objectives. Data analysis systematically followed through data processing, presentation, analysis and interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought information on various groups the police can engage in policing. Various groups identified are as presented in Figure 1. The study also sought to establish the mode of engagement and approaches that may be useful in such engagement. The findings are presented in this section.

From the findings in Figure 5.5, 10.6% (33) indicated women, 26.5% (83) indicated youth, 30.1% (95) indicated religious leaders and elders, 18.6% (58) indicated civil society organizations, while 14.2% (45) indicated media.

Engagement with the youth (26.5%) can enhance situational awareness about what is happening around and improve understanding of dynamics, risk perceptions and concerns within communities; this can then serve as a basis for informed and more effective policing.

Respondents indicated that for meaningful engagement, the police should maximize opportunities for communicating, building mutual understanding and trust, and exchanging information with the youth. The police should also listen to concerns of the youth, recognize their perceptions of problems and not try to immediately reframe or redefine the problem to suit the police agenda.

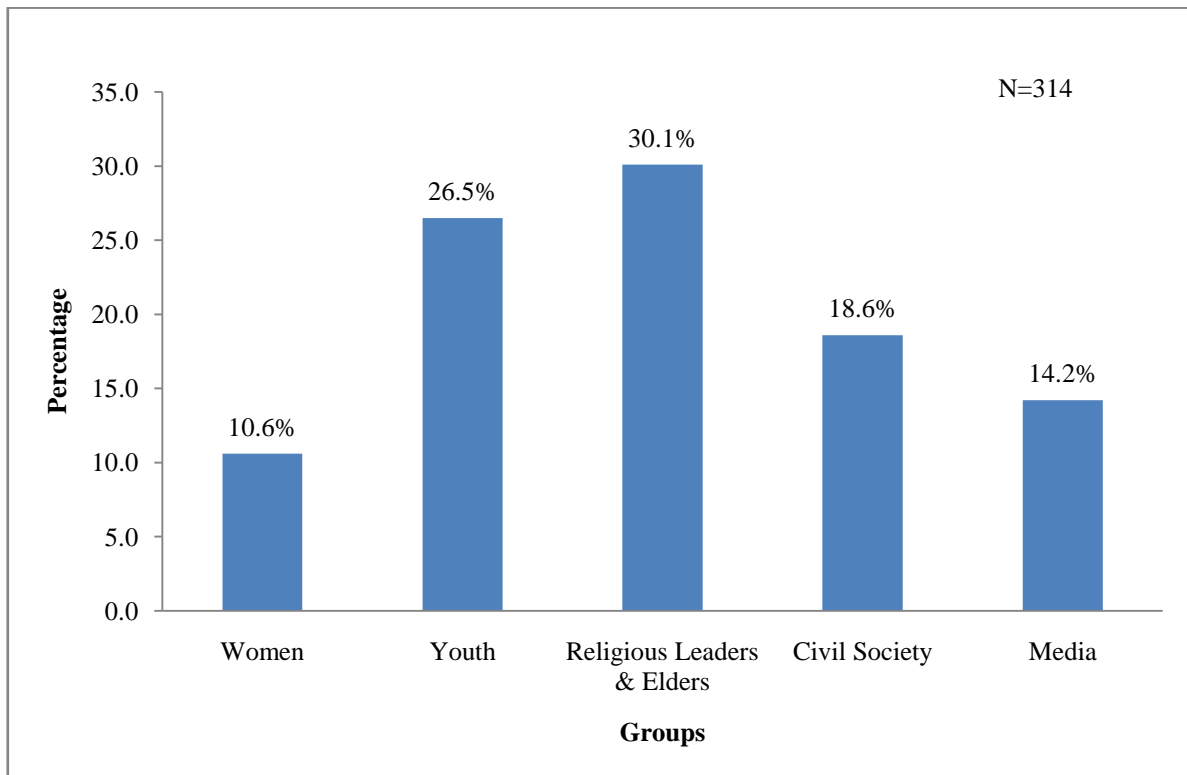


Figure 1: Groups Police Can Engage for Effective Policing

Dandurand (2013) explains that youths are inundated with information made available by new technologies including cell phones and internet which have revolutionized how youths communicate. On the other hand, OSCE (2014) posits that young people tend to use different methods of communication and get information from different sources compared to those used by older people. For many young people, their social lives and friendships are maintained primarily via social-networking media. The use of social media can be an effective way of reaching young people and communicating key messages to them.

On approaches of engagement, respondents indicate that the police can organize events in which young men and women can learn about and experience police activities. This serves the purpose of demystifying police actions and approaches so that young people have a better understanding of police work. The police should also endeavour to have diverse personnel that reflect the population, with sufficient experience and an appropriate gender balance. Such composition can easily get along with the youth. The police can also organise recreation activities with the youth. They can also establish a presence on social media to engage with young people, including proactive dialogue and creating awareness on terrorism. They can establish or support peer-mentoring schemes, whereby young people who have acquired some skills or those who have been de-radicalised can be mentors to support members of their peer group.

Changing perceptions of the police among young men and women, and the perceptions of youth among the police, is a prerequisite for effective engagement and takes time. As representatives of the state, it is first and foremost of critical importance that the police empathize with young people in the community and afford them the same respect and protect their rights in the same manner as they would with any other members of the society. If young people feel respected and valued by the police, they are much more likely to be open to dialogue and engage effectively with the police. This is a plus in law enforcement (OSCE, 2014).

Engaging women (10.6%) is another strategy in implementing policing approaches. Although women are greatly affected by terrorism and violence, they are mostly side-lined in efforts and programs to counter terrorism and violent extremism. Since they are affected, they should be brought on board to actively participate in initiatives designed to ensure the safety of their community. Women are therefore more likely to help in identifying and addressing specific political, social, economic or cultural concerns in the community that may lead to terrorism or radicalization.

Integrating women into peace building processes offer new degrees of democratic inclusiveness and new ways of solving conflicts (Noor & Hussein, 2010). On the flip side, conventional literature has uncovered an alarming trend described as soft radicalisation of women. Over the world, women are being indoctrinated into a very austere and intolerant interpretation of religion. Women have perpetuated attacks and are being recruited for further plots. Several reasons have been cited for women involvement in terrorist acts, including individual and social- economic factors. Although motivation are complex, such factors include avenging death of relatives, the promise of a better life, unmet needs and unsolved grievances, need for companionship and feminism.

Some of the most notorious cases of female terrorists radicalised by spouses are Samantha Lewthwaite, the ‘White Widow’ believed to be one of the masterminds of Westgate attack in Nairobi. Another is Violet Kemunto and Mariam Abdi who were some of the key masterminds of Dusit D2 terror attack in Nairobi on 15th January, 2019 that claimed over 21 lives. According to police report, a mysterious woman known as Mariam Abdi played a key role in delivering weapons that were used in the Dusit D2 attack from Somalia. Anti- Terror Police Unit (ATPU) failed to find her in Eldoret, where she was thought to be after failing to nab her in Mombasa. A separate team was dispatched to Malindi to hunt her down (Achuka, 2019).

The second mastermind, Violet Kemunto was the wife to one of the attackers, Ali Salim Gichunge. Violet Kemunto, a 2014 Journalism graduate from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), is believed to have slipped to Somalia moments before the attack. The terror couple lived a lavish lifestyle and in 2018 took a holiday at the coast to celebrate the first anniversary of their marriage (Daily Nation, 18 January, 2019). The recruitment of women in terror activities and religious indoctrination therefore calls for full involvement of women as policy shapers, law enforcement officers, educators, community members and activists in addressing conditions conducive to terrorism and the effective prevention of terrorism.

To engage effectively with the women, respondents indicated that the police should effectively engage women at all stages of development, implementation and evaluation of policing approaches, counterterrorism and counter-radicalization strategies. This means that apart from inclusion of policewomen in operation, they should also institute mandatory gender training for all supervisors and police officers performing security checks and body searches on women. OSCE (2014) further reiterates that they should include specific gender benchmarks in the monitoring and regular evaluation of the effectiveness, as well as positive and negative impacts, of their policies and measures against terrorism, and increase the presence of women among the police involved in countering terrorism and in engaging the public on preventing terrorism at all levels.

On approaches that may be useful in engagements of women, respondents indicated that the police should encourage and support initiatives to empower women’s participation in the public sphere, which is essential so that they can play an active role in addressing terrorism and radicalization threat in the community they live in. They should include awareness-raising about the risks of, and potential responses to terrorism as part of initiatives to inform women about measures to address their concerns. They should also identify women groups, their capabilities and needs, in order to expand partnerships thereby reaching out to various groups in the county. They should further ensure that women have better access to programmes that address gender issues and imbalances to disengage from terrorism and that guarantee them adequate protection and support. These programmes should also support the provision of platforms and safe spaces for women to share experiences and concerns in facing terrorism and violent radicalization, including skills and tools to respond more effectively to terrorism and radicalization.

OSCE (2014) emphasizes that the police should ensure that its engagement strategy is based on a sophisticated understanding of the culture, religion and gender roles within a particular community, and that such a strategy is free of stereotypical assumptions and does not have any negative consequences for the women engaged.

Religious leaders & elders (30.1%) are key stakeholders in policing. In the fight against crime and terrorism, groups may employ propaganda to justify their cause, including using religion to whip up emotions. Police need to engage religious leaders, elders and faith-based organizations in realizing that they can provide crucial feedback on how counterterrorism measures have affected their communities and are perceived in the community. They should also be made to understand that they may be better placed to proactively and effectively challenge some aspect of the narratives used by terrorists to justify crime. Erwin (2013) adds that they should be aware of the presence of individuals or materials circulating within their community that are providing narratives justifying terrorism and intercept them, including handing them over to the law enforcement agencies. This group can as well provide crucial feedback on how counterterrorism measures are perceived within, and help law enforcement better understand their communities and tailor their outreach initiatives to their understanding.

For successful engagement with religious leaders and faith based organizations, the police should make it clear that they do not hold any religion responsible for terrorism, and actively challenge the association of terrorism with religion. Police should make every effort not to be seen to favour one group over another and

engage with leaders and organizations from all religions and encourage them to mobilize jointly to denounce terrorism and express solidarity with all victims of terrorism. As reiterated by Weisburd *et al.* (2002), the police should also base their engagement on an accurate understanding of local demographics, dynamics and the complexities of religious communities and adopt reflective approach in identifying and rejecting the possible stereotypes and prejudices they may hold against the religious beliefs and religious leaders. The police should demonstrate knowledge sensitivity to religious beliefs, although it may not be practical to expect police officers to share the religious beliefs of the community that they are seeking to engage with.

Engaging civil society organizations (18.6%) was cited as another strategy in policing. Police should engage civil society and involve them in the development of partnerships; especially if there have been tensions between them in the past. Civil society can play a role in preventing crime. Chumba *et al.* (2016) who explains that civil society can spot the signs of vulnerability and work towards protecting individuals from radicalization and crime through improved parenting, neighbourhood support, and community resilience. Civil society organizations can contribute in fighting crime by raising awareness among the public about nature of threat and applicable laws and measures to prevent and combat crime, and educating them on what they can do to protect themselves against crime as well as what the police is expected of in maintaining human rights while countering crime. They can also bring to fore conditions conducive to crime and undertake specific activities to address such conditions.

In their engagement, they can actively speak out against crime and extremist ideologies, leaders and groups to delegitimize them, and engage individuals drawn into terrorism to divert them from a path of terror acts. Civil society organizations can enhance understanding among people about the role and functions of the police in countering terrorism and channel to police some of the views and concerns of communities with regard to fighting terrorism and countering terrorism (OSCE, 2014).

Engaging media (14.2%) as a strategy in policing can enable the police reach a wider audience. The use of media to disseminate information and its ability to give voice to the struggle of a range of actors, as well as the ability of this form of soft power to counteract crime can only be beneficial to security personnel (Chumba *et al.*, 2016).

Media and terrorism hold each other in a strange balance; terrorism needs the media, and media needs terrorism. Government and media need to strike a balance about use of confidential information in the public sphere. Certain information cannot be made public in light of the importance of counterterrorism policy. However, increased competition in the media causes problems in making agreement with media outlets and the government. Indeed, this has been the case terrorist attacks in Kenya, where the media has been blamed in some instances for wrong reporting (Chumba *et al.*, 2016).

Media can contribute in fighting terrorism by using media platform to strengthen cohesion and mobilizing members of the community in support of problem-solving initiatives, including those designed to address community grievances and conditions conducive to terrorism, and actively speaking out against violent and extremist ideologies, leaders and groups to delegitimize them. They can also create safe spaces for discussing issues and concerns and facilitating the sharing of experiences and views among members of the public, and acting as an intermediary for communication between the police and different communities, groups and individuals, especially those that are reluctant to engage with, or are hostile to, the police.

Police on the other hand should consider media as independent and equal partners in addressing security issues of common concern within a community, in this case, terrorism. The police should not attempt to control or influence media for biased reporting. They should also engage various media houses in addressing various issues with less restriction and provide protection to media personnel when faced with unwarranted hostility due to their crusade against crime. This should be timely to avoid media being on unnecessary receiving end.

IV. CONCLUSION

Engagement with various groups in the community is a critical component of any effective policing initiative, particularly one aimed at preventing general crime, terrorism and countering violent extremism. Engagement is not just about organizing a meeting with group members. Effective engagement is a highly complex process that demands sensitivity and very careful planning. Haphazard police-community engagement can be more detrimental than no engagement at all. Engagement should therefore be well structured and meaningful. Furthermore, approaches that are useful in such engagements should be encouraged.

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Dr. Fredrick Okoth Otieno, PhD. "Effective Policing Through Community Engagement." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 09(6), 2020, pp 01-06. Journal DOI-10.35629/7722