

COMMUNITY POLICING AND ITS EFFECTS ON MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC ORDER IN KITUI COUNTY, KENYA: A CASE OF NYUMBA KUMI INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT

Security in Mutitu Sub-county has not been as desired due to different conflicts. Despite the adoption and implementation of community policing, and subsequently the 'nyumba kumi' initiative to curb the vice at the grassroots level, insecurity is still taunting locals. This study aimed to establish the initiative's put in place and their effect maintaining public order by Nyumba Kumi Initiative. The objectives of the study were two: to determine the effect of conflict mitigation strategies and stakeholder participation at the Nyumba Kumi level on maintaining public order in the sub-county. The study adopted a descriptive research design that utilized semi-structured questionnaires to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The stakeholders involved in the Nyumba Kumi initiative were targeted, and a sample of 108 was utilized, drawn from village elders, nyumba kumi officials, National government administrative officers, and the members of the national police service. The study found that alternative dispute resolution techniques were used to mitigate conflicts in the sub-county. It was done through mediation, negotiation, and arbitration. It was also noted that, the members of the general public were not open to consulting with the members of the security due to fear, and the key method of public participation was through public barazas.

Key Words: Conflict Mitigation Strategies, Stakeholder Participation, Public Order

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Security worldwide is critical for the stability, growth, and development of nations (Dupont, 2017). The security concerns are both military and non-military environments, the majority being in non-military contexts (Ivancik, Jurcak, and Necas, 2015). According to Gunsalves (2016), insecurity in the globe is a normal occurrence, while the absence of it reflects abnormality, the reality that dictates levels of stability and development.

In the United States of America, the International Advisory Board (2024), a combination of myriad issues emanating from the social, economic, political, and environmental fields are the causative issues behind the insecurities witnessed. They range from Terrorism, political clashes, inequality due to poverty, among other crimes.

To respond to security concerns threatening the stability of nations and the safety of citizen and their properties, countries have adopted community policing. This strategy brings different stakeholders on board in the quest to control the occurrence of insecurities. The United States of America adopted community policing and became prominently implemented in the 20th Century due to the upsurge of crime and poor police –citizen working relationship. The initiative was therefore adopted to allow citizens to be part of the acquisition and maintenance of public order in their communities, through open communications and adoption of decentralization in the police service (Skogan & Hartnett, 2019).

The concept of community policing was drawn from the broken windows theory, which Kelling and Wilson proposed in the 80s. The theory holds that crime takes place in communities, and communities live in crime or its fear. To curb this, therefore, the community-based solution is key; managing insecurity from the street level for public order to prevail. The adoption of the concept in the USA brought positive results; between 1995 and 2005 the prison population, especially those prosecuted for low-level crimes, rose from USD. 1,5 million to USD. 2.2 million, and subsequently triggered legislative action that saw funds allocated to members of the police service to implement community policing in the Violent Crimes Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994. This was further supported by the federal government, which allocated over 208 million dollars in 2015(Cossylean, 2019).

In the African context, security situations keep changing, from post-independence struggles to the current volatile internal conflicts characterized by their complexity, unpredictability, and a mixture of security threats ranging from low-level disputes to high magnitude occurrences such as violent extremism and terrorism in some parts of the continent. The adoption of community policing was timely to curb the surging waves of conflict through a collaborative model between the citizens and law enforcement agencies. The goal is to reduce crime, provide lasting security solutions, counter extreme violence and terrorism, and build good relationships among stakeholders to foster joint solutions (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2014).

South Africa adopted community Policing in the 1990s, its formal adoption in the constitution was in 1993, key goal being to democratize the police and legitimize the model. Its adoption was meant to reduce crime and improve service delivery by strengthening the security and safety of all citizen (Pelser, 2000). According to the South African Police Service (2024), community policing in the country has recognized the interdependence of the police and the local community members to allow joint security problem-solving approaches. Trust has therefore been built and crime reduced through reporting.

The five East African countries have developed and implemented common policing standards, covering security and policing issues, as well as human rights. Their policing standards are drawn from the United Nations, African Union, and the East African Community policy frameworks. These common standards

include the provision of security and safety through construction of community policing frameworks specific to nations, but are rights-based and promote as well as support democratic governance in matters of security (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2011).

In Kenya, the concept emerged in 1990, a time when the crime rates had increased, and the relation between the police and the community was sour. To mitigate the problem, the adoption of community policing began. It was formally launched in 2005, the government committing to institutionalizing community policing to prevent crime and rebuilding the community-police relationship. This was later included in the 2010 Kenyan constitution as a key democratic policing activity that allows communities to participate in their security issues. An Act: the National Police Service Act 2011 was passed into law, and its formal structures were established. In 2013, the 'Nyumba kumi Initiative' neighborhood watch was introduced to allow village-level vigilance and for neighbors, familiar with each other and activities in their village, can report any suspicious activities to the police, hence reducing crime and leading to sustainable security(National Police Service, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Community policing at the grassroot level is called 'nyumba Kumi', a Swahili term meaning ten houses, a grassroots level organization within the local community, It involves the collaboration between the members of community at the village level with the police, introduced as a formal security policy in 2013. It's an initiative meant to monitor and report matters insecurity for effective resolution and sustainable public security. However, despite its adoption and implementation in Kenya, Mutitu sub-county, Kitui County, still records high conflicts, within the different communities residing in the area. Common are the conflicts between the farmers, who are from the Kamba community and the pastoralists from the Oromo and the Somali community. The effects of the conflicts cause damages such as displacement of people from their homes, and deaths. Moreover, the rise of mistrust between the community and the police is common in the sub-county.

There exists a research gap on the effect of community policing and public security in Mutitu sub-county. This research was therefore carried out to fill the gap and to aid the Local members of authority as well as the local community policing members to make effective decisions that can improve their public safety at the local level.

Objective of the Study

- To examine how conflict mitigation strategies affect public order in Mutitu Sub-county, Kenya.
- To assess how stakeholder participation affect public order in Mutitu Sub-county, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical Review

Maintenance of Public Order by Nyumba Kumi Initiative

Community-based policing initiatives have become popular innovations that are driving the force behind police officers' efforts to lower crime rates and maintain order. A study by Jarman (2006) in Northern Ireland revealed that such initiatives are valuable elements of order management and conflict reduction. Jarman (2006) noted that establishing community-based initiatives across Northern Ireland significantly helped maintain public order and reduce inter-communal violence and conflicts. Similarly, MacDonald's (2002) study in the United States established that community policing effectively reduced urban violence in major cities in the United States. Specifically, the study revealed that community policing effectively prevented violent crime. Other studies that have found community policing led to a reduction in crime include the study by Connell et al. (2008) in the United States. Time series analysis of the interviews and the data crime for the initiative location showed reduced property and violent crime in the targeted location during the community

policing program. Similar findings were reported in Tuffin et al.'s (2006) study, which was carried out across six cities in the UK. The study evaluated the outcomes realized by the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) in England between 2003 and 2005. The findings showed a significant reduction in total crime recorded in the targeted sites compared to the control sites.

Conflict Mitigation Strategies and their effect on public order by Nyumba Kumi Initiative

As showcased in a study by Maguta et al., (2021), the Nyumba Kumi initiative is a valuable peace-making approach that is applicable in the Kenyan context. In the qualitative study, Maguta et al., assessed the effectiveness of the approach in resolving the security issues in Njoro, Nakuru County, an area with an extensive history of ethnic and politically-motivated violence. The study captured the opinions of strategic informants such as pastors and teachers, key figures in society. The study utilized the Bottom-Up Peace-Building Theory of John Paul Lederach, which emphasizes the involvement of grassroots communities in peace-building in its assessment. As such, the study collected the informants' responses where the traditional liberal approach that involved deploying outside forces such as police was pitted against the Nyumba Kumi approach. From its findings, it was established that the application of the Nyumba Kumi initiative and its community-involving mitigation strategies resulted in more positive outcomes being obtained. However, while it had its positives, it's crucial to observe that this research had several limitations such as its limited geographical scope, its limited period of evaluation and the absence of quantitative data to back up its findings.

Stakeholder Participation on public order in Nyumba Kumi Initiative

Kaito and Njoroge (2023) explored the extent of stakeholder involvement such as the Nyumba Kumi initiative in implementing community policing in Taita Taveta County and to analyze its impact on crime prevention and attaining improved security outcomes. Using a descriptive survey research strategy, the researchers collected data from various stakeholders who included the national government administrative officers, national police service, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, and residents. The study employed the contingency theory in its approach emphasizing that the variables of the environment have a direct influence on organizational design decisions. From the findings, it was established that stakeholder participation holds a critical position that affects the effectiveness of community policing projects. However, the research notes that despite the rising crime rates in the county, most residents don't actively participate in community policing projects. This study draws emphasis on the importance of encouraging citizen involvement in community policing and recommends that the government takes steps to promote such involvement. It's also vital to note that the study had several gaps that include failing to address potential barriers to community participation, the role of cultural and socio-economic factors in influencing stakeholder involvement and, the long-term sustainability and scalability of community policing initiatives in the area.

Theoretical Framework

Public Participation Theory

The theory was developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. The theory is stipulated to hail from the works of political scholars. In this theory, the main stipulation is promoting public participation more so in its development and maintenance when making important societal decisions (Reed et al., 2018). In this theory, several key assumptions are made (King et al., 2015). First off, the theory assumes that individuals and communities have a vested interest in their own well-being, and as such, they should be given the opportunity to influence the decisions and policies that affect their lives. Under this theory, it is assumed that public participation is a critical aspect of governance that works to boost the legitimacy of policy formulation and implementation while simultaneously promoting community ownership and responsibility.

With regard to this research, this theory holds a crucial role. The proper adoption and implementation of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative hinges on successful engagements between different stakeholders such as security agencies and the public. In this structure, the residents of the area are recruited as allies who help in the maintenance of public order. The initiative deployed, the Nyumba Kumi initiative, aligns with the underlying principles of this theory by promoting the involvement of community members in the decision-making process. Through this process, community members can work to ensure their security by giving them the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making and implementation of security strategies. This kind of action fosters collective responsibility, something that has a direct influence on the security outcomes obtained.

According to this theory, it's critical to actively involve community people in the governance of their own communities and include them in decision-making processes. In the case of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative, which relies heavily on community participation and collaboration to enhance security and public order, Public Participation Theory serves as a guiding principle for effective implementation. It is anticipated that this theory will shed light on the role of stakeholder participation in the Nyumba Kumi initiative in maintaining public order in Mutitu sub-county. This theory is applicable to the study because it promotes partnership and collaboration among the stakeholders in community-based policing efforts and initiatives. It promotes inclusivity, accountability and trust building in the context of community policing and maintenance public order. Public Participation Theory highlights the significance of fostering transparency, communication, and trust between government institutions, law enforcement agencies, and community members. The Nyumba Kumi Initiative, by encouraging open dialogue and cooperation among these stakeholders, creates a platform for mutual understanding and collaboration in addressing security challenges.

Conceptual Framework

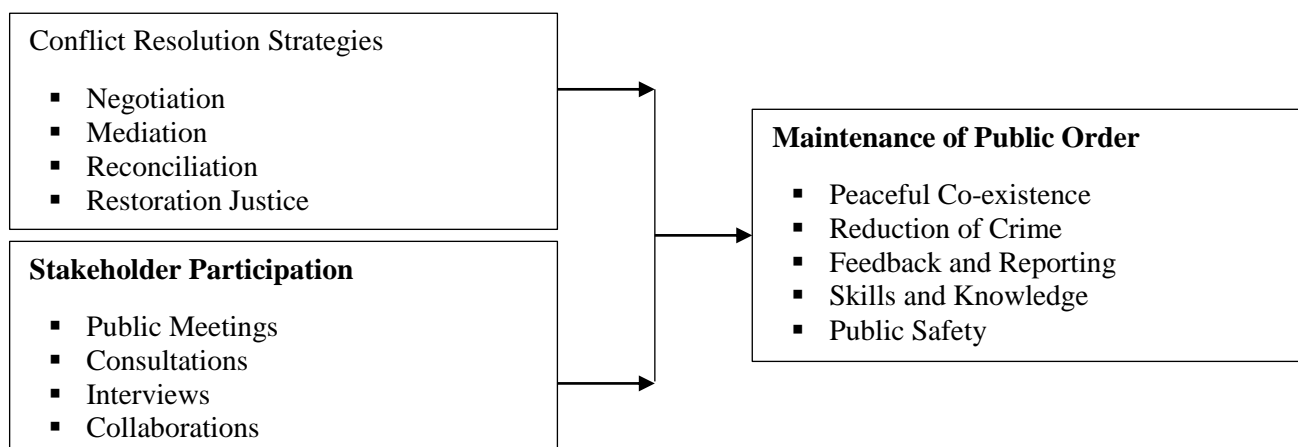


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
(Source: Author, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted, and the site of the study was Mutitu sub-county, Kitui County. The study targeted all the stakeholders that are directly involved in the nyumba kumi implementation process. They included 440 nyumba kumi chairpersons, law enforcement officers, and the National Government Administrative officers from the rank of the Deputy County Commissioners to the Assistant Chief. The distribution of the targeted population is presented in table 1

Table 1**Target Population**

Population Targeted	Total No.
Village elders	112
Assistant Chiefs	20
Nyumba kumi officials	225
National Police service officers	75
Chiefs, ACCs & DCC	8
Total	440

Source: The Deputy County Commissioner's office, Mutitu Sub-county (2024)

A sample of 138 was eventually used in the study as presented in table 2. Purposive sampling method was used to reach the sample from the National Government Administration office and the National Police Service, simple random sampling was used for village elders, assistance chiefs and Nyumba kumi officials. While census sampling method was adopted for the chiefs, ACCs & DCC.

Table 2**Distribution of Sample Size**

S/No	Population Targeted	Total No.	30%	Sample size
1	Village elders	112	33.6	34
2	Assistant Chiefs	20	6.0	6
3	Nyumba kumi officials	225	67.8	68
4	National Police service officers	75	22.5	22
5	Chiefs, ACCs & DCC	8	census 8	8
	Total			138

Source: The Deputy County Commissioner's office, Mutitu Sub-county (2024)

A semi-structured questionnaires was used to gather data and a pilot study composed of 10 percent of the target population was carried out in Mutitu North sub-county a homogeneous neighboring subcounty. Permission to undertake the research was sorted from Kenyatta University graduate school, and research Permit from NACOSTI. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Anonymity and confidentiality of the study respondents were adhered to during the entire research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic data

The research had targeted a sample size of 138, but eventually 108 respondents returned the questionnaires forming 78 percent response rate, indicating it was a good number to use for data analysis, as provided by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) that a response rate of above 70 percent was adequate. All the categories of respondents were represented, and included 35% National Police Service Officers, 25% assistant chiefs, and Assistant county commissioners, 15 percent village elders and 16% nyumba kumi officials. Of all the respondents, 53.7 % were male while 46.3 percent were female.

The majority of the respondents (52.8%) were aged between 43-55, 5.6% were aged between 18-30, 26% were aged 31-42, while 16% were 56 years and above. This indicates that the majority of the respondents in the study were older, and understood the concept of community policing well. On the experiences with nyumba kumi initiative implementation, the average number of years involved was 8.6 years (SD=2.7), minimum was 2 years, and maximum number of years service and implementing the initiative being 12. Among these respondents, those who have implemented the initiative least were the Assistant County

Commissioners, who posted a mean of 4.25 years. Those with the highest number of years in implementation of the initiative were the National Police service officers, whose average number of years in community policing was 10.73. An average of 7.44 years denoted that the sampled population was well grounded on matters implementation of community policing and its effects on public safety in Kitui County.

Conflict mitigation strategies

The researcher sought to determine the conflict mitigation strategies used in maintenance of public order in Mutitu sub-county, Kitui County, at the ‘nyumba kumi’ level of community policing. The respondents filled their opinions in five Likert-scale questions, from 1-5, 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=strongly Agree.

Table 3

Conflict Mitigation Strategies

Report	Negotiations by Nyumba Kumi led to public order maintenance	Nyumba Kumi committees carry out successful mediation	Differences are successfully reconciled by Nyumba Kumi committees	Justice in some instances has been restored through Nyumba Kumi	Nyumba Kumi committees are effective in resolving local conflicts
N	108	108	108	108	108
Mean	2.56	2.92	2.51	2.05	2.19
Std. Deviation	1.461	1.375	1.495	.951	.961

Source: Field Data (2025)

The outcome revealed that 92.7% utilized alternative dispute resolution strategies, particularly mediation and arbitration, to resolve minor conflicts within their ‘nyumba kumi’ villages. Third parties were involved, commonly being the Members of the National police service, leaders within the community, the National Government Administrative officers, particularly the chiefs and Assistant Chiefs, parents, and the village elders.

Moreover, when asked whether the mediation processes were inclusive, 90.7% noted that they were. 9.3% felt the process was always inclusive. This, therefore, indicated that the mediation process was inclusive and fruitful in ensuring that public safety and eventual security were attained, but much is needed to improve its inclusivity.

After conflict resolution, reintegrating offenders back into the community is key. The respondents were asked whether there are mechanisms in place to ensure re-integration. 68.52% of the responses reported that mechanisms for re-integration existed, however, 31.48% reported a lack of such mechanisms. This therefore indicated that a good number of respondents were not aware of the reintegration mechanisms in place.

Therefore, there is a need to work on this area to empower all the ‘Nyumba kumi’ initiative officials and everyone involved in the community policing initiative in the sub-county. This will not only foster security but also ensure re-integration is done to minimize relapse to crime and other criminal activities that threaten security.

The different groups represented in the research respondents gave similar opinions that the nyumba kumi initiative, through their committees, carried out successful mediations, negotiations, and reconciliation. The lack of divergent views indicates that the national police service, the village elders, nyumba kumi members, the National government administrative officers at the grassroots level are key community policing players that contribute to security in Mutitu sub-county, Kitui, county. This therefore calls for action by the

policymakers to design initiatives that will be able to inform and train leaders at these levels on alternative dispute resolution.

Stakeholder Participation

The respondents were asked to indicate if stakeholders participated in the Nyumba Kumi initiative implementation.

Table 4

Stakeholder Participation Strategies

Report					
	Nyumba Kumi committees carry out regular monthly meetings	The members of the public can openly consult with local security agencies	Members of the public are open to interviews by security agencies	Members of public and security agencies collaborate in maintaining public order	Stakeholder participation in Nyumba Kumi has brought peace
N	108	108	108	108	108
Mean	2.45	2.30	2.19	2.33	2.87
Std. Deviation	1.397	1.225	1.320	1.381	1.395

Source: Field Data (2025)

The results showed that public baraza was the most common methodology, having been reported by 87% of the respondents, followed by the utilization of technology, where use of SMS was reported by 8.3 %, and 4.6% reported to have used WhatsApp. The public Barazas brought people of all ages together and formed more cohesion in resolving security issues. Moreover, information provided was reported to be more verifiable in public barazas as compared to SMS and WhatsApp, which can be used to peddle false information that may take a long time to verify. Public Barazas also act as an avenue that leads to discussion of further issues aside from security that affect them, such as politics, economic issues, developmental and social aspects, among others.

The respondents were further asked whether the members of the public were open to security agencies to an extent that they would freely allow themselves to be interviewed. A mean of 2.19 was posted, clearly indicating that the majority disagreed and feared open interviews with the national police. The lack of free will for this level of interaction was reported to stem from the mistrust between the citizen and the police, and therefore, acting as a barrier to ensuring insecurities are prevented or handled amicably. Contrary to the previous opinion of openness to interviews, the respondents further agreed to some extent (mean of 2.87) that the inception and subsequent implementation of the Nyumba Kumi initiative in the sub-county has brought peace at the grassroots levels, while others were neutral. On consultation between the members of the public and the security officials, the majority disagreed across the targeted groups, but agreed that they came together during the committee's monthly meetings. This therefore calls for intervention on how to improve the relationship and collaboration between the public and all security agencies at the local level. This will change the perceptions and, as a result, lead to collaborative decisions on security matters.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Community policing in Mutitu sub-county, Kitui County, has been implemented as a grassroots community policing agenda. To curb insecurity in the area, the initiative utilizes different alternative dispute resolution strategies to mitigate conflicts, and they include mediation, negotiation, and arbitration, complete with mechanisms in place to allow re-integration of offenders.

On stakeholder participation in Nyumba Kumi, it was clear that members majorly participated through public barazas and Nyumba Kumi committees held monthly. Only a few reported the use of SMS and WhatsApp platforms. Moreover, there was no strong collaboration between the members of the public and the members of authority in resolving insecurity in the sub-county.

The study recommends the following based on the research outcomes:

- An advocacy for the use of alternative means to participate in the Nyumba Kumi initiative. One that can allow for anonymity and confidentiality without jeopardizing the authenticity of the information given.
- Training opportunities for all the Nyumba Kumi leaders on Alternative dispute resolution, to allow their practice to be formal, standardized and professional.
- Civic education at the grassroots, aimed at building strong relationships between the citizen and the authorities, and making the initiative an effective means of maintaining public order.

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