



Barriers to effective community policing: A case study of Kizingitini in Lamu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the barriers to effective community policing in Kizingitini, Lamu County, Kenya. It was informed by the need to examine and address challenges in community policing, identify implementation constraints, assess public perception to inform future strategies, and ensure successful community involvement and security. Although numerous studies have been conducted on community policing, this study provides a detailed breakdown of barriers facing community policing specific to the Kizingitini area. The study sought to examine four major thematic areas: the image of the police and the trust between the community and the police, barriers to reporting crime, understanding and training in community policing, and extremist influence. The study adopted a case study research design anchored on the broken windows theory. The target population was the residents of Kizingitini area aged 18 years and above. The respondents were police officers, chiefs, community policing committee members, and Kizingitini residents who had been randomly selected from three villages in Kizingitini. The total sample size was seventy-three (73) respondents. Interview schedules and key informant interviews were used to gather data from the respondents. Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data was analysed by interpreting the responses and aligning them with the four thematic areas. The findings indicated that barriers to community policing in Kizingitini included poor police image and public mistrust, lack of crime reporting, lack of training, poor understanding of community policing, and the influence of terrorist extremists. The study recommends training community policing committee members and police officers in community policing. It also recommends targeted police and community engagement activities, such as meetings and symposiums to discuss community issues and to find common solutions, as well as budgetary allocation from the national government to support community policing activities.

Key words: Barriers to Reporting Crime, Extremist Influence, Community Partnership, Community Policing, Lamu, Police Image

I. INTRODUCTION

The police are no longer the sole custodians of law and order. All members of the community have become an integral part of the policing ecosystem to enhance the security, safety, and quality of neighbourhoods. According to Kappeler et al. (2020), community policing is a collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems. They add that this broad outlook on crime prevention and control emphasises on the need to place community members as active participants in the process of community problem-solving. Awoyemi et al. (2025), posit that police officers also play a pivotal role, with an extended demand for organisational changes to facilitate and accommodate this working relationship with the community. Community policing emphasises preventing crime and social ills and enhancing safety and security, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life in the community (Awoyemi et al., 2025).

By changing the way the police think and act, community policing was lauded as the first major reform in policing in the last half a century. This policing model broadens the police mandate beyond a narrow focus on fighting crime to include efforts that address the fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighbourhood decay (Brown, 2012). The community policing philosophy provides an organisational strategy that challenges police officers to solve community problems in new ways. Police must form partnerships with people in the community, allowing average citizens to have input into the police process in exchange for their support and participation. Community policing rests on the belief that contemporary community problems require a new decentralised and personalised police approach that draws citizens into the process of policing themselves (Kappeler et al., 2020).

Most African nations have domesticated community policing as practised in developed countries like the United States and Britain; however, the strategy differs from nation to nation depending on the country's historical background (Yegon, 2020). Community policing in Kenya was launched as a national programme by President Mwai Kibaki on 27th

April 2005, at the Ruai Police Station. Kibaki averred that existing community policing initiatives had succeeded in reducing crime and directed that lessons learnt and experiences gathered in these pilot programmes “be vigorously and systematically rolled out to other parts of the country” (Government of Kenya, 2005). Since then, community policing initiatives have been introduced in various parts of the country, and some police officers have subsequently been trained in community policing. In 2005, the National Police Service adopted community policing through an initiative aimed at enhancing security for the citizens (National Police Service, 2014). It was meant to improve relationships, raise the level of trust among the practitioners, promote accountability, and appeal for partnerships and collaboration between the police and the community in the management of the local security (Henry & Mackenzie, 2009).

To create a society free from crime, the police and the public must work together. In the past, the relationship between the two has been strained and distant, making it difficult for them to support each other. Kizingitini is no exception to this poor relationship. Scholars have written extensively on community policing. The most perplexing topic is: What obstacles do community policing efforts in Kizingitini face in detecting and preventing crime? Thus, this study is necessary to address this gap.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Community policing has substantially impacted policing in different parts of the world. Kenya has had both success stories and failures. The challenges that have plagued the implementation of community policing have been constant. Kizingitini is located on Patte Island in Lamu East Constituency, Lamu County, in the coastal region of Kenya. As one of the administrative areas in the constituency, community policing here faces several obstacles. According to Kibunja (2013), there is a negative perception of the police, which emanates from issues of arbitrary arrests, alleged police brutality, and allegations of disrespect for religious beliefs. Most community policing committee members are elderly people with no formal education and limited capacity to understand their roles and responsibilities. They are also not trained on what is expected of them, thereby hampering their effectiveness (Oenga, 2015). They face accusations of being betrayers by the community and are then isolated or even loathed by the residents. Residents dislike them and rarely report incidents to them or the police. Kiprono (2007) avers that the poor public image of the police and perceived poor customer service procedures also discourage the community from reporting crimes, creating opportunities for criminal activity to flourish. Those suspects who are reported to the police are known to threaten reporters with severe consequences. According to Nyaga et al. (2017) Lamu County has suffered several terror attacks, mainly from the Al-Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia. This group is known to have terror cells used to recruit gullible, idle and unemployed youths from areas of Kizingitini, Bwajumwali, Tchundwa and Siyu (Nyaga et al., 2017). This is exacerbated by grievances of unemployment and marginalisation, which also fuel violent extremism and radicalisation, creating fear in those people seen to be working with the police. The Al-Shabaab terror group is known to exploit these grievances to gain support. Police officers and other government security-related organs struggle to gain the trust of the local population, which hinders their ability to gather intelligence and implement effective policing and counter-terrorism measures. Together, these barriers significantly hinder community cooperation, making it difficult for residents to report crimes or work with the police. In Kenya, most studies on community policing have focused on its role in the prevention and/or reduction of crime, e.g. Muchira (2016) and Wanjohi (2014). While studying the challenges facing the implementation of community policing in Kibera, Kiprono (2007) focused on police resources, police culture, lack of legislative and administrative reforms, and confidentiality as major bottlenecks in the implementation of community policing. This study, therefore, expands the view on barriers to community policing within the broader context of marginalisation, poor understanding of community policing, and extremism, while considering the unique location of the area of study and how, together with other adjoining factors, hinders the effective implementation of community policing in Kizingitini, Lamu County.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Examine the challenges in community policing in Kizingitini, Lamu County.
- ii. Identify community policing implementation constraints in Kizingitini, Lamu County.
- iii. Assess public perception on community policing in Kizingitini, Lamu County, to promote effective community engagement and security.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Broken Windows Theory

This study is grounded in the broken windows theory, which emphasises the importance of addressing signs of social disorder to deter more serious criminal activity. Introduced by Wilson and Kelling in 1982, this theory posits that

observable signs of disorder and neglect—such as broken windows, graffiti, and antisocial behaviour—can foster an environment that is conducive to increased crime and social disorder. In policing, this theory proposes the aggressive targeting of minor offenses as a strategy to mitigate the prevalence of major crimes. The theory suggests that concentrating police efforts in high-crime areas and arresting individuals for low-level infractions can maintain social order and address minor issues to prevent the escalation of criminal behaviour. This theory has been instrumental in shaping law enforcement strategies and policies, particularly within the framework of community policing, since it translates to police and community working together to clean up neighbourhoods, share information on hotspot areas, and address minor issues before they escalate (Muniz, 2012).

According to Jose and Josukutty (2018), this theory can be integrated into the framework of community policing as a strategy to target minor offences that lead to the deterioration of neighbourhoods. They add that by employing proactive measures to deal with visible signs of disorder in partnership with the community, police can uphold social order and cultivate an environment where criminal activities are less likely to flourish. Community policing provides an effective platform for implementing the principles of the broken windows theory, as it emphasises community engagement, collaborative problem-solving, and a focus on preventive measures (Jose & Josukutty, 2018). This aligns seamlessly with the proactive approach to community policing advocated by the broken windows theory, which emphasises the importance of collaboration between the police and residents in managing and preventing disorder. Such partnerships not only strengthen social control but also serve to restore the communal fabric of neighbourhoods.

2.1.2 The Concept of Community Policing

Community policing is often referred to as both a philosophy (a way of thinking) and a strategy (a method of implementing the philosophy) that enables the police and the community to collaborate in addressing problems of crime and disorder (Kappeler et al., 2020). The philosophy component is explained as the promotion of a problem-solving approach to public safety involving partnerships with the community. In contrast, the strategy component refers to the practical involvement of community members in public safety (Olabisi, 2013). The Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (2012) defines community policing as a philosophy that promotes organisational strategies that support the systemic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues, such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. Community policing also emphasises preventive proactive policing. It calls for the police to concentrate on solving the problems of crime and disorder in neighbourhoods rather than simply responding to calls for service. This model considerably expands the scope of policing activities because the targets of interest are not only crimes but also sources of physical and social disorder (Kappeler et al., 2020).

Among the many law enforcement agencies, community policing has emerged as the most popular and demanding policing strategy, and it is currently employed in many nations to combat insecurity in society. According to Gill et al. (2014), the number one facilitator of enhanced security is the public, who, through community policing, are encouraged to take requisite measures to prevent themselves from becoming victims of crimes. They further argue that police officers cannot be in all places all the time, thus the need for community members to embrace community policing. At the heart of community policing is the redefinition of the relationship between the police and the community, whereby the two collaborate to identify and address community problems. Through this relationship, the community becomes a “co-producer” of public safety, allowing the problem-solving process to draw on citizen expertise in identifying and understanding social issues that contribute to crime, disorder, and fear within the community (Gill et al., 2014).

According to Kappeler et al., (2020), community policing is a philosophy and not a specific tactic. They posit that community policing is a proactive, decentralised approach designed to reduce crime, disorder, and by extension, fear of crime, by intensely involving the same police officers in the same community on a long-term basis, so that residents will develop trust to cooperate with police by providing information and assistance to achieve those three crucial goals. Community policing employs a variety of tactics, ranging from park and walk to foot patrol, to immerse police officers in the community and encourage two-way information sharing so that members of the community become the officer’s eyes and ears on the streets, helping to set police priorities and policies. Additionally, the police officers then carry this information back to the rest of the officers so that problems can be solved and the quality of life of the community is improved. Improved police and community relations are a welcome by-product of this approach, not its primary goal (Kappeler et al., 2020).

In 2013, largely impelled by the Westgate mall attack, the country-wide ‘Nyumba Kumi’ initiative was launched. Mainly imported from a Tanzanian experiment, the system brings security to the level of the ‘household’ by creating clusters of 10 houses (as the name implies in Kiswahili—‘nyumba’ [house] ‘kumi’ [ten]) that consist of local residents and stakeholders. The idea is that these clusters meet regularly (twice a month), share information, and, when needed, provide this information to the relevant levels of the national administration. For many, it is seen as a form of local

surveillance by the state (Brankamp, 2020; Kioko, 2017). Interestingly, Nyumba Kumi has only been practised in a few places, both in urban and rural settings; however, it largely exists in lower-income neighbourhoods and poor urban settlements that face high-terror-related incidents or threats. Ultimately, Nyumba Kumi never really took off as intended (Andhoga & Mavole, 2017).

In May 2016, three key booklets were launched to provide direction on community policing to police officers: (1) the Community Policing Inspector General's Guidelines to Police Officers; (2) The Handbook on Community Policing Forums and Committees; and (3) the Community Policing Information Booklet (National Police Service, 2016a, 2016b). Once handed out across the country, police officers would possess clear instructions on how to apply community policing as a way of 'Building Safer Communities Together.' Consequently, all community policing activities were brought under one framework, including 'Nyumba Kumi'. The "Nyumba Kumi" structures have since been incorporated into the community policing programme and were structured to operate as committees at the police station level. Essentially, the community policing guidelines highlight the centrality of the police and the state. As the bedrock of democratic policing, community policing is also seen as a vessel to enhance relationships between the police and the community, improve state legitimacy, reduce crime, and, more recently, combat terrorism. However, the success of community policing has been limited due to some hindrances.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Challenges in Community Policing

Community policing challenges are broad problems, obstacles or situational difficulties that hinder community policing efforts, such as lack of public trust, social disorganisation, lack of public participation and community beliefs about crime. Mutahi et al. (2024) acknowledged that a lack of trust is a major challenge in community policing, noting that trust involves the confidence of the citizens in individual police officers and the police service as an institution. They posit that public loss of trust and confidence in the police service by the members of the public is a serious concern that hampers community policing. It is even more pronounced in areas characterised by insecurity, violence, and conflict. Trust does not develop easily, and its current status is limited in terms of who is to be trusted, to what extent, and the areas to which it is extended amongst the police. This study, however, did not investigate whether the police have trust in the public, who they are supposed to partner in community policing, as the owners of community concerns that ought to be addressed in partnership.

Diphoorn & van Stapele (2021) identified social disorganisation as a challenge in community policing. They averred that weak community bonds and a lack of informal social control can make it difficult for communities to work together with police. They posit that in socially disorganised communities, residents have weaker social networks since there is no sense of shared obligations. They are therefore less interested in their neighbourhoods, making them unlikely to intervene in situations that may lead to disorder or crime, such as supervising neighbourhood children, sharing information, and reporting crimes. When community members lack strong social ties, their willingness to share information or cooperate with the police tends to diminish. This study, however, fails to talk about homogenous communities such as Kizingitini residents, who are deeply religious and close-knit yet still lukewarm to community policing.

Albrecht (2019) identified a lack of public participation as a challenge in community policing. He posits that communities may have lost trust and be unwilling or unable to get involved in community policing because of a history of poor relationship, corruption, and misconduct by police and other government agencies. Others have a sense of exclusion and a lack of ownership and may view community policing as a sole responsibility of the police. In areas with high poverty levels, social inequality and unemployment are significant barriers to participation in community policing. When community members are concentrated on immediate survival needs, engaging in community policing initiatives may not be a priority. Additionally, marginalised groups may feel that their concerns are undervalued by decision-makers (Oenga, 2015).

In some areas, residents may view crime as a source of income, which creates a challenge to community policing efforts. This has been alluded to by Gill et al. (2014), who affirmed that viewing crime as a source of income, especially in marginalised communities, presents a significant obstacle to successful community policing efforts. This perspective stems from economic and social factors that can make illegal activities seem like a rational choice for survival or financial gain. In other contexts, some communities may not see community policing as a priority, or they may see it as being opposed to their interests. In some poor neighbourhoods, crime can be an integral part of the local economy, and many residents benefit from the proceeds of these illicit activities. Consequently, there may be a tolerance for their continuation and in more tranquil settings, the community may not see crime as a problem and in other circumstances, community policing may simply be one issue along with many others with which the community is concerned (Grabosky, 2009).

2.2.2 Community Policing Implementation Constraints

Community policing constraints are more specific barriers or limitations on action that are often practical or systemic, which prevent the implementation of community policing, such as insufficient funding, lack of understanding of community policing and training, police ineffectiveness and structural and administrative weaknesses. Research by Mammus (2010) established that in Nigeria, the major implementation constraint in community policing was a shortage of manpower, inadequate funding, poor conditions of service of the average policeman, inadequate logistical and material support and infrastructure to cover all the areas of the country. These findings resonate well with the situation in Kenya. In a study by Oenga (2015), it was revealed that historically, community policing was failing because of a lack of funding. The participation of the community and the police in community policing activities is often constrained by limited resources. For a long period, the police have lacked facilities in ensuring the enhancement of community policing. Dilapidated structures, including a lack of facilities in police stations, are the order of the day. Therefore, the public may lack interest in community policing due to the lack of these resources, including cash expenditures on meetings and stationery.

Ambiguity and lack of understanding of community policing were identified by Kiprono (2007) as a constraint in community policing. He argues that community policing means different things in various contexts, not only due to variances in policymaking and the design of the programme, but also due to the larger social, cultural, and political environments in which it is implemented. He argues that the lack of understanding is prevalent in both law enforcement and community policing committee members. The lack of training for both the police officers and the community policing committee members was a key contributor to the lack of comprehension. The study did not mention the need for the citizen to have an understanding of community policing.

Mutahi et al. (2024) posit that police ineffectiveness is a challenge in community policing. They assert that there is a widely held perception of the police as ineffective, which many citizens cite as a primary reason for not reporting suspected criminal activity. The police are accused of slow response to incidents, failing or being slow in making arrests, and responding only if they are given financial incentives (bribes). These perceptions of police ineffectiveness, bribery and corruption and selective enforcement of the law derail communal support and hence affect community policing.

According to Mutahi et al. (2024), structural and administrative weaknesses have also hampered community policing. They point to an institutionalized culture of impunity, politicisation of the police service and usage by the state for repressive purposes, poor deployment of police officers, a rigid police organizational structure, allegations of extrajudicial killings, insincere police reforms that are framed as tactical concessions or gestures to donors on the part of political elites, and logistical inadequacies, including understaffed stations and lack of equipment, all hamper effective community policing. Most of the aforementioned studies have not captured the constraints of community policing in the context of marginalisation, radicalisation and extremism, a gap that is intended to be addressed by this study.

2.2.3 Public Perception on Community Policing

This is the collective view, opinion, or understanding that citizens hold about community policing. It is shaped by various factors like perceived benefits, awareness, and impact. It may be influenced by indirect and direct association with community policing, community policing committee members, the Kenya Police Service and police officers.

The perception of the public on community policing in Kenya is largely negative due to a number of interconnected factors. However, various positive views on community policing also emanate from areas where its implementation has had a positive impact on the security of the community. Mwaura (2014) argues that a poor police image leads to a perception that the police are corrupt, brutal, ineffective, and malicious, which directly undermines community policing efforts. He adds that because of persistent mistrust between the community and the police, more so in the handling of information that is given to them, few people report incidents to them. The effect is that even in community policing, the public perceives that the police do not serve their best interests. However, the study leaves a gap on whether the police have trust in the citizen who are supposed to be their partners in community policing. The study does not show the nexus between community policing and reporting of crime.

In a study by Kiprono (2007), he cited a lack of genuine involvement by the citizens, where they complained of not feeling adequately involved in community policing and that it only served the interests of the police, where the citizens are perceived as a tool for information extraction. Thus, for them, community policing is a way for the police to extract information, while community members who participate are seen as informants and face suspicion. Accusations of bribery, corruption, police misconduct, arbitrary arrests, harassment, and alleged extrajudicial killings also erode public trust and taint community policing efforts (Oenga, 2015).

There is a general misunderstanding of community policing among the public. This is largely exacerbated by a failure of the government to adequately incorporate civic education. The term community policing is popular within the citizenry, but the actual meaning and implementation remain a mystery to most members of the public (Mutahi et al., 2024). Some members of the public have complained about the misuse of power by community policing committee

members, whom they accuse of using their roles for personal gain, leading to extortion and harassment (Diphorn & van Stapele, 2021).

According to Wanjohi (2014), a key motivation for citizens in community policing is the belief that it will lead to improved police effectiveness, reduce crime and ease response to distress calls. Even though some citizens may not fully understand community policing, they associate it with collaboration and information sharing, which promise better response times and improved police effectiveness. In a study conducted in Nakuru county, Mutahi et al. (2024), concluded that even though citizens have little institutional trust, some citizens express trust in individual police officers based on their behaviour and cooperate with them to ensure some aspects of community policing are fulfilled. These positive individual encounters have a major impact on the perception of the public towards community policing. While studying factors affecting the implementation of community policing in Kajiado, Mwaura (2014) expressed that some citizens are willing to work with the police if they perceive it will lead to better security outcomes within their area. He pointed out that the community policing platform can become a valuable communication hub where citizens who fear reporting directly to the police can share information. This is born out of the desire for collaboration and the willingness of citizens to have a stake in the policing of their area.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used a case study research design to examine the barriers to community policing in Kizingitini, Lamu County. The method was best suited to enable the researcher to gain an in-depth, comprehensive understanding of the issues under study within their real-world context.

3.2. Target Population

The target population was the residents of Kizingitini aged 18 years and above.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

The study was carried out amongst Kizingitini residents, police officers, area chiefs and community policing committee members in Kizingitini area in Lamu East constituency. Police officers and chiefs were randomly selected from the nearest police station and administrative areas, respectively. Kizingitini is generally divided into three areas (villages) locally named as: Kwa chini/Nyangwani, Kwa kati/Kengewani, and Kwa juu/Sarigoi. A sample of 10 randomly selected people from each of the three villages was selected, making a total of 30 residents. 30 police officers from Kizingitini police station, Bwajumwali police patrol base, and Tchundwa police post were randomly selected, and 3 chiefs were also randomly selected. 10 community policing committee members were randomly selected, representing the three villages. The total sample size was 73 respondents.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The study used interviews to collect data from the respondents. Interviews yield rich, qualitative data and enable follow-up while capturing the nuanced personal emotions, attitudes, and experiences of respondents through one-on-one interaction and flexible questioning.

An interview schedule was used to solicit data from the residents aged 18 years and above. The interview schedule contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Gender balance was also considered in conducting the interviews. Key informant interviews were conducted with the police officers, area chiefs and community policing committee members. The interviews aimed at obtaining information on four thematic areas, namely: police image and trust between the community and the police, barriers to reporting crime, understanding of community policing and extremist influence.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study produced both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was organised, cleaned, coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data was analysed by interpreting the responses and aligning them with the four thematic areas. Data was well studied to achieve the most cogent conclusions possible to enhance the credibility, reliability, and quality of the analysis made by the study. Data was interpreted through percentages, tables and bar charts.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All respondents were guaranteed secrecy and anonymity before and after the study. They all gave their informed consent and participated willfully.



IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Background Information

The study established that educational levels were relatively low in Kizingitini. Only 3% of those interviewed had university degrees, and none of them were permanent residents. 7% were attending a polytechnic or some other educational institution, 43% had completed their secondary school education, 12% had only completed primary level education, 24% had dropped out of school due to various challenges (mostly a lack of school fees) and 11% had never attended school at all. The primary occupation of the majority of Kizingitini residents was fishing, accounting for 74% of the sampled residents, 16% indicated that they were small-scale farmers, and 10% were students in the local county and national polytechnic. Other respondents were community policing committee members (village elders), and police and chiefs (civil servants). It is important to note that some community policing committee members were also fishermen, while others were also small-scale farmers. Although the study did not ask about the personal income of the respondents, which is a sensitive issue, it can be inferred from their education and employment that most residents had low and inconsistent income due to the type of employment they had. These findings are crucial in establishing the integrity of the overall findings of the study.

Table 1
Background Information (Level of Education)

Respondents	Level of education					
	Degree	Polytechnic or other institution	Secondary school education	Primary school education	School dropout (Secondary & Primary)	Never been to school
Kizingitini residents	1	1	2	8	12	6
Police officers	1	3	26	0	0	0
Area chiefs	0	1	2	0	0	0
Community policing committee members	0	0	0	1	7	2
Total Percentage	3%	7%	43%	12%	24%	11%

According to Table 1 above, the level of education of the various respondents who were involved in the study is shown. The highest number of respondents (43%) had obtained a secondary school level of education, while only 3% had a university degree.

Table 2
Background information (Occupation)

Respondents	Occupation				
	Civil servants	Fishermen	Village elders	Small-scale farmers	Students
Kizingitini residents	0	22	0	5	3
Police officers	30	0	0	0	0
Area chiefs	3	0	0	0	0
Community policing committee members	0	0	10	0	0
Total Percentage	45%	30%	13%	7%	5%

Table 2 above presents the occupations of the respondents as of the time of this study. Most of the respondents (45%) were working as civil servants (Police officers and chiefs), while the least were students in local national and county polytechnics.

4.2 The Image of the Police and Trust Between the Community and the Police

The study found that public perception of the police in Kizingitini is largely negative. It was characterised by widespread mistrust, largely anchored on concerns about police brutality and misconduct, use of excessive force, insensitivity, bribery and corruption, disregard for citizens' rights, and a perceived lack of willingness to serve the public. The respondents were also concerned with the reliability and consistency of the police in serving the public and fighting crime. Respondents argued that this perception negatively affects the image of the police service as an organisation, and any actions or efforts to engage the community or even the community policing committee members are viewed as a



one-sided approach that is only meant to benefit the interests of the police and not for the greater good of Kizingitini residents. It also makes community members unwilling to trust or cooperate with police officers. This is therefore a significant barrier to community policing.

The police do not trust the community, and vice versa. Despite the creation of a community policing committee, its activities and effect on the ground are weak and lack vigour. This was a result of mistrust not only from the community but also from members of the community policing committee, who accused the police of disclosing information when they entrust them with policing intelligence, thereby exposing them to revenge and backlash from criminals. There was also a perception of a historical legacy of repressive policing still etched in the minds of the respondents. Having a history rooted in colonial-era policing, where it was often used as an instrument for control and state repression and rather than public service, the police service still carries this tag, especially in urban informal settlements, and areas where profiling and excessive force are common. The deep-rooted effect of mistrust and poor police image leads to a majority of the public viewing them as “enemies of the people” rather than protectors. At the end of the day, the community policing efforts were found to be moribund due to this barrier.

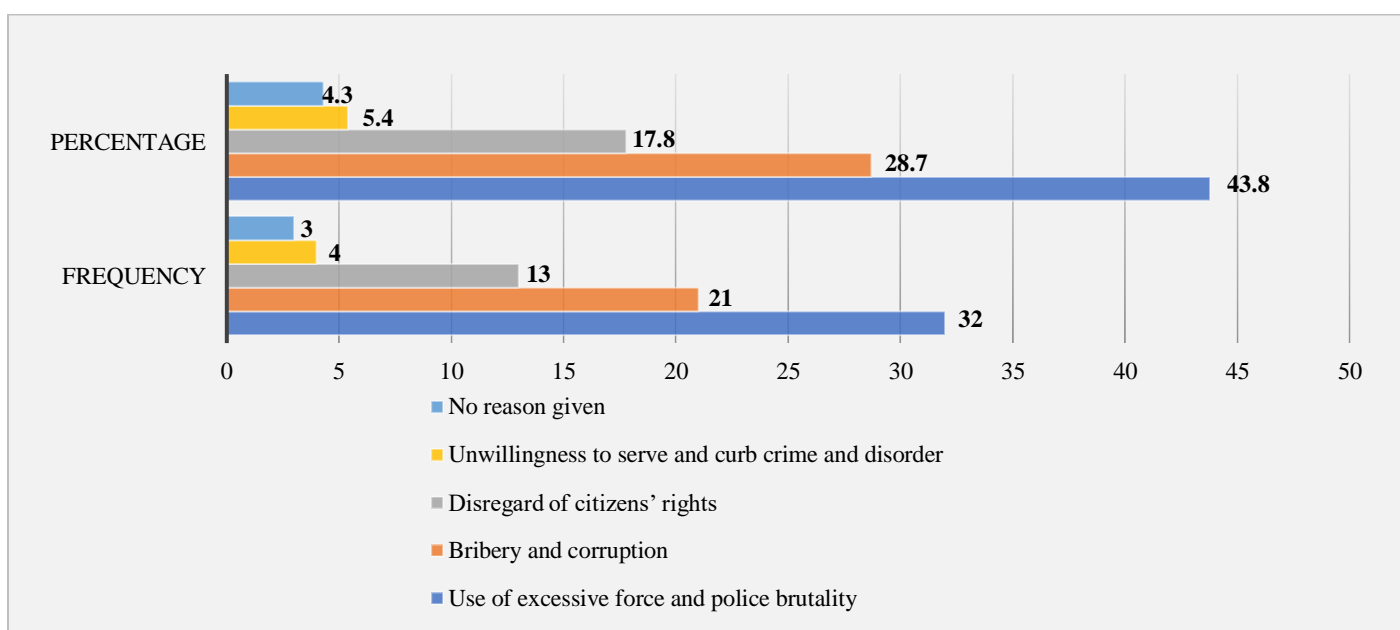


Figure 1
Drivers of Poor Police Image and Mistrust

As indicated in Figure 1 above, the major driver of poor police image and mistrust that significantly hampers community policing is the use of excessive force and police brutality. Bribery and corruption came second, and disregard for citizens’ rights followed. However, many of the respondents did not have direct or personal encounters where they were met with excessive force or brutality, but mostly relied on what was being reported in the media.

Mutahi et al. (2024) agree that for community policing to thrive, trust that involves the confidence of the citizens in individual police officers and the police service as an institution must be present. This study went further and established that the police did not trust the public as genuine partners in community policing. They accused them of insincerity, only supporting the police when themselves, their families, or friends are not in conflict with the law. Mwaura (2014) acknowledged that ineffectiveness and lack of confidentiality in the police with regard to information that is given to them by the public also leads to public loss of trust and confidence and is a barrier to community policing.

4.3 Barriers to Reporting Crime

The study found that barriers to reporting crime in Kizingitini are numerous, complex and intertwined. They majorly stem from a lack of confidence in the police and the criminal justice system. There were deep-seated perceptions of bribery, inefficiency and a feeling that justice is only for the rich who are able to bribe the police, prosecutors and judicial officers. Respondents indicated that it would not be beneficial to report a case that could either be turned against you or even require you to bribe to be assisted. The red tape associated with police paperwork and lengthy police, prosecution and court procedures were also cited as a hindrance to reporting crime since it causes frustrations and inefficiency. Another critical barrier that was identified was the fear of retaliation or re-victimisation. Community policing committee members were hesitant to report incidents and share intelligence on criminals because of fear of

being targeted by the same criminals. This is equally true with members of the public and victims of crimes who fear reprisal from offenders or further victimisation by the very system meant to protect them. Some respondents argued that some residents fear entering a police station to file a complaint due to an unfriendly atmosphere and poor customer service. They also accused the police of often failing to respond to community concerns, further alienating the public. Considered together, these barriers to reporting crime are also significant barriers to community policing in Kizingitini area.

Respondents indicated that other socio-economic factors, cultural norms and social stigma were also hindrances to reporting crime and hence acting as barriers to community policing. Community policing committee members talked about the close-knit Muslim Bajun community that almost solely occupies the Kizingitini area as a people whose norms prohibit one from reporting incidents to the police, believing that traditional dispute resolving mechanisms ought to be exhausted first lest one is viewed as a betrayer and faces stigma from the community. Fear of not being believed, self-blame, shame and when the social status or credibility of the perpetrator was perceived to be high were also identified as barriers to reporting crime. The essence of marginalisation and poor economic power was also cited as a disenfranchisement to reporting crime. Respondents also indicated that the lack of awareness of legal and reporting mechanisms hinders the reporting of crimes. The Bajun community consider itself to be marginalised with low literacy levels, and hence most of them may not be cognizant of organisations such as the Independent Policing Oversight Authority, the Ombudsman office and other bodies that check the accountability of the police and address complaints lodged against them. Some respondents cited incidents where victims may not report petty crimes since they consider them insignificant, or because they believe the police may not address them effectively.

Table 3
Barriers to Reporting Crime

Barriers	Percentage
Mistrust in the police and the criminal justice system	17
Bribery and inefficiency	21
Red tape and lengthy police, prosecution and judicial procedures	9
Fear of retaliation or re-victimisation	23
Socio-economic factors, cultural norms and social stigma	11
Fear of not being believed, self-blame, shame	4
Marginalisation and poor economic power	9
Petty or insignificant crimes that police may not address	6

As indicated in Table 3 above, fear of retaliation or re-victimisation was identified as the major reason why victims of crimes, members of the public and community policing committee members were not reporting crime. This means that despite the homogenous nature of the Bajun community in Kizingitini, fear of retaliation was a major barrier. Bribery and inefficiency came second. Kizingitini is a predominantly Muslim dominated area, known to accuse police of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of radical Muslim clerics and suspected terror sympathisers. The respondents also expressed a strong mistrust of the police and the criminal justice system.

Conversely, Diphorn and van Stapele (2021) believed that a lack of informal social control and social disorganisation causes disharmony and disinterest in neighbourhoods hence the residents are not concerned with sharing information and reporting of crimes to the police. In addition, Gill et al. (2014) posit that some people view crime as a source of income, hence a rational choice for survival and therefore will unlikely report crime. This study identifies a fresh perspective on fear of not being believed, shame and self-blame as a realistic barrier in reporting crime. It also advances the concept of lengthy criminal justice procedure as a deterrent to reporting crime and hence a barrier to community policing.

4.4 Lack of Understanding and Training in Community Policing

The respondents cited the lack of understanding and training in community policing as one of the significant barriers to community policing. None of the police respondents, community policing committee members or even members of the public who participated in this study has ever been trained on community policing. There was an understanding amongst the respondents that community policing involved sharing information with the police and working together to keep the community safe. But that was all they understood. The lack of understanding stemmed from issues such as a lack of training and a lack of awareness of the respondents on the concept of community policing. Community policing committee members were old folks who had little, if any, education. Since their work is routine and tiresome, and there is no budget allocated for the implementation of community policing, most of them were engaged in fishing to supplement their income and are therefore partly available for meetings.



Police officers also indicated that the lack of clear policy guidelines had also hindered effective implementation of community policing. They cited the National Police Service Act No. 11A of 2011 which created the County Policing Authorities, whose mandate is implementation of policies, guideline development, training members of community policing within the county and preparing county community policing reports and submitting them to the cabinet secretary in the ministry which has not been fully realized due to bureaucracy and other obstacles that are founded on competing interests in different law enforcement arms of government. Most residents and community policing committee members were passive actors, mainly allocating ownership of community problems to the police rather than the whole community, and subsequently acting like informers and intelligence collectors, further hindering effective community policing.

As captured in the interviews with police officers, community policing for most of them was about retrieving information from the community and about the community coming to them, rather than the other way around. Some police officers saw it as a way of public engagement that entailed speaking to citizens on the streets, while for others, it was seen as a way of being friendly to citizens. This skewed view by the police officers did not see community policing as a holistic strategy that all officers must employ, but as specific tasks carried out at particular moments or by a designated officer, such as the officer commanding station (OCS). This uninformed understanding of community policing among the police officers, which is translated into their daily policing operations, was found to be a great barrier to the effective implementation of community policing.

Table 4
Lack of Understanding and Training in Community Policing

Comprehension and training in community policing	Percentage
Lack of training in community policing	32
Lack or poor understanding of community policing	27
Unclear or conflicting community policing policy guidelines	18
Low educational levels	16
Lack of budgetary allocation and the availability of committee members	7

As identified by the respondents in Table 4 above, lack of training in community policing was the greatest barrier, with poor or lack of understanding of community policing coming in second. Unavailability of community policing committee members who go out to fish in the ocean very early in the morning and come back later in the evening in a bid to earn a living was also cited as an obstacle, since there is no budgetary allocation for community policing activities.

Kiprono (2007) agrees that a lack of understanding of community policing is a barrier to community policing. He argues that this is exacerbated by the lack of training of police officers. This study found that there is a need to have an equal understanding of community policing by both the police, community policing committee members and the public. It also identified the need for a single uniform policy to spearhead community policing.

4.5 Extremist Influence

The influence of extremism was found to be a major barrier to community policing. The study found that the Al-Shabaab terrorist group had influenced Kizingitini and, by extension, other parts of Lamu East by exploiting real or perceived economic marginalisation, poverty, deprivation, unemployment, low education levels and poor governance to recruit the youth, instil fear and advance an ideology of hatred towards law enforcement and other government organisations. The police in Kizingitini had documented cases of local youth being recruited to join Al-Shabaab due to being susceptible, further fueling fear among the residents of possible repercussions of building a closer relationship with the police lest they are targeted. Due to the porous border with Somalia and the dense Boni Forest, which provides a haven for their operations, Lamu county has seen several Al-Shabaab terror attacks that have claimed hundreds of lives of both civilians, police and military officers.

Extremist influence was identified as a barrier to community policing, since it erodes public trust, creating a divide between communities and the police, leading to cynicism in the ability of the police to provide security and other services, which are critical for effective community policing. It was established that residents and community policing committee members were fearful of appearing friendly and cooperating with the police due to unknown consequences from extremist elements. They were also careful about who they talked to, what they said and, in whose presence, since they believed that they were Al-Shabaab sympathisers amongst them in the community.

Respondents argued that in a bid to counter extremism, radicalisation and recruitment of local youth in Kizingitini by Al-Shabaab, a heightened security response by the government turned the community into surveillance targets, alienating residents and further potentially discouraging community members who could otherwise be valuable



partners. Due to increased security operations to counter the terror group, some residents complained of profiling, harassment and enforced disappearances of youth, and perceived radical Muslim clerics perpetuated by various security actors, which led to alienation of the youth, pushing them further towards Al-Shabaab for identity and respect. This was seen to cause backlash against those who might serve as bridges between the police and the public. The study found that when the Kizingitini area was exposed to the aforementioned elements of extremism, the gap between the police and the public grew, hence strengthening the already existing barriers to community policing. Despite concerns from the residents that a security vacuum could have been created and subsequently filled by other non-state actors, such as vigilante groups, this did not occur.

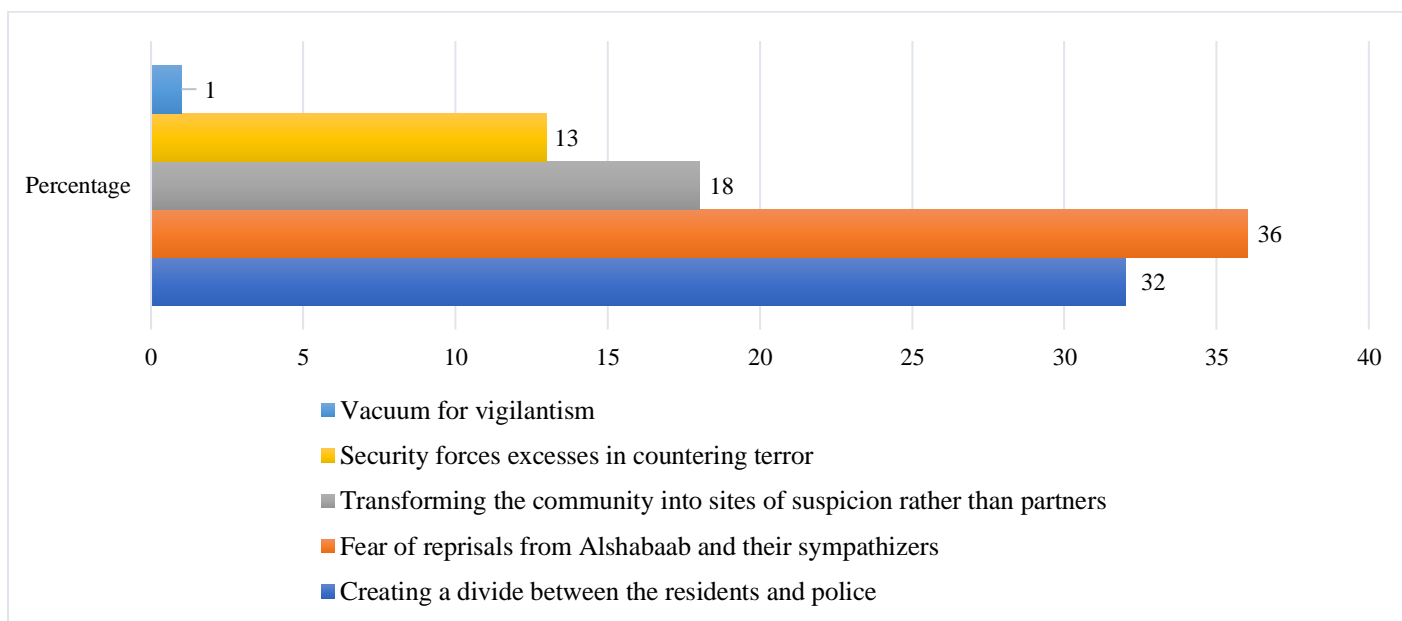


Figure 2
Extremist Influence

As Figure 2 above indicates, the greatest barrier to community policing was fear of reprisals from Al-Shabaab and their sympathisers. The terror group had managed to infiltrate and had made strides in creating fear and a divide between the residents and their trust in the police.

This study highlighted the relationship between extremism and community policing. It emphasised on the enabling conditions, such as illiteracy, marginalisation, and unemployment, among others, that have been exploited by Al-Shabaab to recruit youth and create a hostile environment for community policing. Mutahi et al. (2024), on the other hand identified structural and administrative issues that were obstacles to community policing. He mentions the police organisational structure, logistical and human resources inadequacies as hampering effective community policing.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

There is a general agreement in Kenya that community policing is one of the main drivers of police reforms and the pathway of transitioning to democratic and people-centred policing. This is in line with a fairly global trend of police reform projects that view community policing as a crucial element for building trust in a country’s police and, ultimately, ensuring that communities thrive in safety and security. This study identified key thematic areas that have been obstacles in the implementation of community policing in Kizingitini. Poor police image and lack of trust between the community and the police were seen to be a great barrier to community policing. Several barriers to reporting crime were also identified. Lack of understanding and training in community policing and extremist influence were also seen to be barriers to community policing. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including improving police-community relations, enhancing accountability and transparency, providing adequate training, and fostering genuine community participation in policing efforts. The common thread that cuts across these barriers is the issue of trust and the relationship between the police and the residents, which is the backbone of community policing. In Kizingitini, it is the view of this study that it will take time to break down barriers of apathy and mistrust so that meaningful partnerships

can be forged. Trust is the value that underlies and links the components of community partnership and problem solving, which are key elements in community policing.

Although there has been success in the implementation of community policing in other parts of the country, creating functional and effective community policing programs will require the creativity, energy, understanding, and patience of all the stakeholders. Whatever is applicable in one area may not work in another area, considering the geographical, social, cultural, economic, religious, and security considerations. Joint ownership of problems in the community between the police and residents, where they both voice their concerns, advice, and take action to address concerns, can build a foundation of trust that will allow the police to form close relationships with the community, thereby producing solid results. Without trust between the police and the community, effective community policing is impossible.

5.2 Recommendations

To effectively implement community policing in Kizingitini, comprehensive community policing training should be conducted. Skills in customer service, problem-solving, and conflict resolution are critical and should be included in the training. Community policing committee members should also be trained and carefully and impartially selected for appointment while considering their education and actual understanding of the area they represent.

A lack of sufficient resources has been a significant challenge in community policing. There is a need for the national government to allocate adequate resources, including funds, personnel and equipment to support community policing initiatives and motivate both the police and the community policing committee members. This is particularly important in economically deprived areas like Kizingitini, where residents are more concerned with putting a meal on the table more than anything else.

Reinvigorating communities is essential if we are to deter crime, build trust, and create more vibrant partnerships. Targeted community engagement activities, such as meetings and symposiums to discuss community issues, enhance civic education, and encourage community participation in security issues, can be a good starting point to build trust. This should be done in a multiagency approach that includes the police, community, national government administration officers, religious leaders, community-based organisations, other government agencies, etc.

Extremist groups exploit economic marginalisation, unemployment and poverty to recruit members, particularly the youth. The national government should seal these loopholes by strengthening economic opportunities and ensuring social inclusion of the people of Kizingitini with programmes such as promoting self-employment through skills training, funding youth economic development initiatives, economic development through infrastructure, and addressing historical communal grievances such as marginalisation.

The national police service should come up with a single inclusive community policing document that gives direction on policy and implementation, and that allows for tailored application depending on the demands of the area of concern. To build community trust, there is a need for actual reforms in policing and the security sector that will gradually help repair the strained relationship between the community and security agencies, caused by the heavy-handed security tactics. Civic education on police accountability organisations, such Independent Police Oversight Authority, among others where citizens can go for redress, should also be prioritised.

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