



Community collaboration in combating banditry in Kenya's North Rift Region: Stakeholder roles, community policing, and institutional constraints

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ABSTRACT

Despite efforts by the state in the form of its security operations and community peacebuilding programmes, banditry continues to pose a security and development threat to the North Rift region in Kenya. This article established the effectiveness of community collaboration in combating banditry, with attention to stakeholder roles, awareness, and perceived effectiveness of community policing initiatives, and institutional barriers to cooperation. The study was based on Institutional Theory and involved a pragmatist, explanatory sequential mixed methods design. This was done in Baringo and Elgeyo Marakwet counties. The total survey population was 242,379 livestock-rearing household heads. The sample consisting of 384 household heads was identified using Fisher's formula and allocated proportionately in the eleven sub-counties; 350 questionnaires were useable, and a 91.1% response rate was realised. Key informants were drawn from national administration, law enforcement, prosecution, the courts, probation services, religious organisations, and civil society, while four focus group discussions involved 40 Kenya Police Reservists. Questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussion guides, and document review were used. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, Spearman's rank correlation and chi-square tests, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed a multi-layered collaboration structure. Youth participation was mainly through peacekeeping tournaments (91.7%), women primarily encouraged youth to resist banditry (88.6%), men led conflict resolution (95.4%), community leaders resolved disputes (89.1%), and civil society organisations promoted accountability (88.6%). Awareness was highest for Nyumba Kumi initiatives (90.6%), compared with National Police Service community policing (45.4%) and Kenya Defence Forces deployment (26.0%). Community policing was rated effective or very effective by 89.7% of respondents. Government intervention effectiveness was positively associated with community policing effectiveness (Spearman's $\rho = .262$, $p < .001$). However, qualitative findings revealed a code of silence, pervasive witness intimidation, weak witness protection and judicial delays. The study concludes that community collaboration is highly valued and locally embedded but cannot produce sustainable justice outcomes without professional policing, trusted reporting systems, witness protection and integration between community and formal institutions. It recommends institutionalising Nyumba Kumi, strengthening specialised police training, formalising elder and peace-committee roles, and protecting witnesses.

Keywords: Banditry, Community Collaboration, Community Policing, North Rift, Nyumba Kumi, Witness Protection

I. INTRODUCTION

Banditry is a continuing security challenge in Kenya's North Rift region, where recurrent cattle rustling, armed raids, killings, displacement and destruction of livelihoods have undermined public safety and development. The affected areas are characterised by a long history of inter-community conflict, resource competition, difficult terrain, limited state presence, and widespread access to small arms. Mkutu (2008) showed that small-arms proliferation and governance weaknesses have intensified pastoral conflict across the Rift Valley. The criminal justice system is expected to prevent victimisation, investigate crime, prosecute offenders and protect communities, but it is evident that banditry is still occurring, thus showing that the criminal justice system alone has failed to give security.

Community collaboration is also critical as community people have intimate skills of the terrain, the people involved, and also how livestock and guns are moved around, and the modus operandi used in planning. Cooperation can help improve early warning, intelligence collection, legal solutions to conflicts, and the recuperation of lost livestock and the legitimacy of state action. Ndiema (2025) noted, therefore, that security governance in Kenya's borderlands

cannot be explained only through formal state institutions, as the locals are still influencing the day-to-day security. Baker (2004) also noted that African security provision is a multi-choice environment where both State and non-state actors engage with one another.

In the North Rift, community collaboration operates through community policing forums, Nyumba Kumi structures, peace committees, councils of elders, women's and youth initiatives, religious organisations, and civil society organisations. These arrangements are supposed to make security a shared responsibility to shift crime prevention away from reactive policing. Gjelsvik (2020), however, identified that the implementation of policy to practice of community policing in Kenya has been inconsistent. Collaboration is hence not simply about committees, but about trust, ongoing engagement, institutional networking, and responsiveness of the criminal justice system to information provided by communities. Community collaboration was viewed as a multi-modal approach and not a single programme. It examined the roles played by youth, women, men, community leaders and civil society organisations. It also explored community policing awareness of the National Police Service, deployment of the Kenya Defence Forces, and the Nyumba Kumi programmes, along with the respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of community policing. It is a way to recognise that community security is generated in complex ways through overlapping relationships of social and institutional connections.

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on local peacebuilding. Leonardsson and Rudd (2015), however, stated that the local turn can contribute to peacebuilding in communities that can be considered active agents in the process, instead of passive recipients of programmes that have been sponsored by actors outside the community. Paffenholz (2015), however, warned that the local turn can regenerate dynamics of power inequalities and the appropriation of participatory arrangements by influential actors. Where elders and local administrators act as peacebuilders in some contexts, they can be linked to peacebuilders and political and commercial networks linked to banditry, particularly in the North Rift. The article is important because it goes beyond this general affirmation of community involvement and examines the reality of community work. It blends household perceptions, stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions and inferential analysis. The article thus presents evidence regarding recognition of community structures, perceived efficiency, and the lack of efficiency of community structures, and explains why a positive perception does not necessarily result in reporting, prosecution and reintegration outcomes.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya has introduced community policing, Nyumba Kumi, peace committees, multi-agency security operations, and partnerships with local leaders to address banditry. These measures are intended to improve trust, information sharing, and collective problem solving. But banditry is still organised, with groups being militarised and linked to commerce, and people living in the area still suffer from violence and displacement. Continuing insecurity has some questioning whether community collaboration is institutionalised enough, and whether it is able to aid the entire criminal justice arc from early warning to investigation, prosecution, and reintegration.

While existing research offers valuable evidence to the community policing and peace-building process, there are some gaps that remain unanswered. Community policing was linked to the improvement in service delivery in the National Police Service, as noted by Chachah et al. (2024), although their study was conducted in Nairobi and not in a pastoral conflict setting. Kipkorir and Omboto (2025) examined joint peace committees in Turkana and West Pokot and demonstrated their value in cattle-rustling management. Little empirical research exists, however, examining the role of the various kinds of community groups, awareness of state and local initiatives, perceived effectiveness, or the institutional barriers to community information being usable, such as criminal information. The problem was therefore not the total absence of community initiatives. The lack of certainty about the effectiveness of a wide-ranging collaboration architecture within an environment of historical distrust, fear of reprisal, poor protection of witnesses, and sluggish institutional response. Lacking both the visible strengths and the hidden constraints of community collaboration, policy can overestimate the importance of participation and under-invest in institutional conditions that enable and defend community collaboration.

1.2 Research Objective

To establish the effectiveness of community collaboration in combating banditry in the North Rift region, Kenya.

1.3 Research Question

What is the effectiveness of community collaboration in combating banditry in the North Rift region, Kenya?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The article was anchored in Institutional Theory as advanced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and developed by Scott (2008). Institutional Theory explains how formal rules, organisational arrangements, professional norms, and shared cultural understandings shape the behaviour and effectiveness of institutions. It is therefore useful for examining community collaboration because anti-banditry responses involve formal security agencies, traditional authorities, local peace structures, civil society organisations, and community norms.

Scott (2008) organised institutions around regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars. The regulative pillar concerns laws, policies, sanctions, and formal authority. The present study includes the mandates of the National Police Service, the Kenya Defence Forces, the national administration, and criminal justice agencies. The normative pillar concerns obligations and accepted standards, including the expectation that elders resolve disputes, communities report crime, and police protect informants. The cultural-cognitive pillar concerns shared understandings that make certain practices appear legitimate, such as elders' mediation, peace tournaments, or the Nyumba Kumi model.

The study objective was interpreted mainly through the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars. Community policing works best when communities have a positive attitude toward state institutions, those institutions are legitimate, and communities see themselves as having a shared responsibility for security. Collaboration is, on the other hand, undermined when police are deemed biased, fear retribution, or have kinship and customary loyalty to the offenders. In addition, Institutional Theory helps to explain how policies implemented formally can be dissociated from their action. The programme may have been established, but may suffer from inadequate training, insufficient resources, competing jurisdictions, and informal power dynamics that constrain implementation.

Protracted Social Conflict Theory provided a complementary understanding of the context. According to Azar (1990), these unfulfilled human needs, communal cleavages, poor government and marginalisation are the factors associated with chronic conflict. This view can account for the fact that cooperation cannot be boiled down to information sharing. Historically marginalised communities may be resistant to State-sponsored security measures if they are not matched with equitable development, legitimacy, and protection.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Stakeholder Participation in Community Peacebuilding

Youth are understood as both drivers of violence and as agents of peace in the peacebuilding literature. Massawe (2021) found that young people contribute to a culture of peace when they are deliberately included in community initiatives. In the North Rift, sport, dialogue and youth ambassador programmes can offer alternative identities to warriorhood and bring people into contact on the other side of a community boundary. But, young people may be limited to symbolic engagement if they are not part of an agenda that takes into account poverty, unemployment, and political manipulation. Women's contribution frequently happens through informal social networks, family influences, religious spaces, and early warning. Kong'ani (2024) noted that women serve a variety of peacebuilding functions in West Pokot, such as mobilisation, mediation, and exercising cultural influence. This literature provides an analytical critique of the notion that peacebuilding is only done by older men. It also implies that women's involvement should be acknowledged and valued in the formal security planning process and not treated as a 'silent domestic effort'.

Muthama et al. (2021) discovered differences between men and women in community conflict resolution in alternative dispute resolution processes. Because of the weight accorded to their elders, it is possible that while the men decide on formal deliberations, the women influence social and household decision-making. Such roles may be differentiated but not necessarily equated as forms of power. They call for an effective collaboration strategy to have awareness of gender, age, and customary authority and how they affect access to decision-making. Civil society groups can help to guarantee, mediate, educate civically, and connect communities and state institutions. Kasera (2025) concluded that the foundation of civil society peacebuilding in hotspot zones lies in the continuity of civil society involvement and political awareness. Oduor and Odhiambo (2025) also observed that the non-state peace actors have also played a role in stabilisation. In short project cycles and donor dependency, there is, however, a risk of continuity of services, as the literature warns.

2.2.2 Community Policing and Nyumba Kumi

Community policing is intended to replace purely reactive enforcement with partnership, problem solving, and shared responsibility. Gjelsvik (2020) concluded that Kenyan police reform has struggled to translate policy commitments into consistent community-level practice. Historical distrust, institutional resistance, and uneven resources continue to shape police-community relations. Kipkorir and Omboto (2025) found that joint peace committees contributed to the management of cattle rustling in Turkana and West Pokot by facilitating communication and local problem solving. Their findings support the use of community structures in pastoral conflict settings. However, peace

committees require recognition, resources, and links to formal agencies if their decisions are to influence security operations and justice outcomes.

Chachah et al. (2024) found that the community policing strategy had a significant influence on service delivery in Kenya's National Police Service. This suggests that public participation may improve responsiveness and confidence in policing. Yet a service-delivery perspective does not fully capture the risks faced by informants and witnesses in organised banditry cases. Badiora (2025) described crime prevention as a process of co-creation between state actors and communities. Co-created security is more likely to endure where community knowledge is matched by state resources and accountability. Ardiansyah et al. (2025) similarly found that institutional design and face-to-face collaboration influence community-policing outcomes. These findings indicate that effectiveness should be understood as a relationship between local ownership and capable formal institutions rather than as a transfer of policing duties to residents.

Nyumba Kumi is especially relevant because it is embedded at neighbourhood level. Its proximity may make it more visible than national policing or military interventions. At the same time, high awareness does not automatically guarantee accurate intelligence, protection of informants, or prosecution. The empirical question is therefore whether locally recognised structures are connected to institutions capable of responding to organised violence.

2.2.3 Trust, Witness Cooperation and Institutional Support

Trust is a key precondition to community cooperation. According to Mutahi (2011), in allotment areas, security provision is double or sometimes triple layered – both legal and illegal – which makes local people wary of formal security agencies. Similarly, Anderson (2021) highlighted that policing in the borderlands is negotiated and contingent on state-community histories and dynamics. Silence may not be indifference, but a sensible reaction, where people do not want to face discrimination or reprisal.

Community collaboration is also a function of what follows information reporting. Inadequate investigations, witness protection, and delayed trials can expose residents without convictions. Oyiembo et al. (2025) linked prosecutors' effectiveness in complex security cases to the ability to coordinate, manage resources, and evidence. Community policing might preserve a good symbolic image without successfully combating criminal networks if there is a failure to adequately support witnesses and act quickly in these situations. Adhola and Ajulu-Okungu (2025) showed that the banditry and displacement in the Northern Rift can be traced back to old educational and development inequalities. This discovery supports the claim that collective cooperation should tackle the structural grievances. Security partnerships of communities that are expected to report crime but receive poor service, high levels of unemployment, and unequal access to resources at other times can easily break when those communities (and their families) are called on to assist in the building of security.

2.3 Knowledge Gap

The reviewed literature establishes the value of youth and women's participation, peace committees, community policing, and local ownership. It, however, lacks the four dimensions in one empirical analysis: different groups of stakeholders, knowledge about community security programs, perceived effectiveness, and the justice-system impediments after reporting. The present study addressed this gap using household survey data, qualitative evidence, and inferential tests from Baringo and Elgeyo Marakwet counties.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a pragmatist philosophy and an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data first established patterns in stakeholder roles, awareness, and perceived effectiveness. Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions then provided explanations for the statistical patterns, particularly the apparent tension between positive ratings of community policing and weak cooperation in criminal cases. Mixed methods were appropriate because measurable perceptions alone could not explain fear, silence, witness intimidation, and the institutional experience of justice actors. Bentahar (2015) noted that mixed-methods designs enable researchers to combine measurable evidence with contextual explanations.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in Baringo and Elgeyo Marakwet counties in Kenya's North Rift region. The two counties were selected because of their recurrent experience of armed banditry, cattle rustling, and inter-community conflict. Their difficult terrain, pastoral livelihoods, cross-community resource movement, and uneven state presence made them appropriate locations for evaluating community collaboration.

3.3 Target Population

The principal quantitative population comprised 242,379 household heads from livestock-rearing households in the two counties. The broader qualitative population included national government administrators, police officers, magistrates, prosecutors, probation officers, religious leaders, managers of non-governmental organisations and Kenya Police Reservists. These groups were included because they participate directly in security coordination, community engagement, prosecution, adjudication, or reintegration.

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Fisher's formula was used to determine a survey sample of 384 household heads. A four-stage procedure was applied. First, the North Rift counties were treated as clusters and Baringo and Elgeyo Marakwet were randomly selected. Second, all eleven sub-counties within the selected counties were included. Third, the sample was proportionately allocated by household population. Fourth, a random starting point and systematic interval of five households were used to select respondents. Key informants were selected through purposive and simple random sampling according to their institutional roles. Four focus group discussions were conducted with 40 Kenya Police Reservists, comprising approximately ten participants per group.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Structured and open-ended questionnaires were administered to household heads. Interview schedules were used with administrators, justice officials, police, probation officers, religious leaders, and civil society actors. Focus group discussion guides were used with the Kenya Police Reservists. Documentary materials, including official records, policy documents, and reports on security interventions, were reviewed to support interpretation.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The instruments were examined for face, content, and construct validity by supervisors and relevant experts. A pilot study was conducted in Samburu County because it shares pastoral and security characteristics with the study area. Ten household heads participated in the pilot and were excluded from the main study. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with .70 adopted as the minimum acceptable threshold.

3.7 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were processed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive analysis used frequencies and percentages. Pearson correlation examined the relationship between the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and community policing effectiveness. Spearman's rank correlation examined government-intervention and community-policing ratings because the measures were ordinal. Chi-square tests assessed associations between Nyumba Kumi, National Police Service presence, Kenya Defence Forces deployment, and perceived community-policing effectiveness. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and organised into themes. The themes were compared with the quantitative results to identify convergence and contradiction.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology and a research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. County and local permissions were secured before fieldwork. Participation was voluntary, oral consent was obtained, and respondents were assured of confidentiality. Identifiers were removed from the data. Local research assistants and translators were used where necessary, while digital and written records were stored securely.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Household head questionnaires were distributed, and 350 were received back from a total of 384 questionnaires. Thus, a 91.1% response rate was achieved. This provided good quantitative "support" for the community-collaboration goal. The qualitative part included the voices of security, justice, administrative and community actors.

4.1.1 Stakeholder Roles in Community Collaboration

Table 1 presents the primary roles that respondents attributed to youth, women, men, community leaders, and civil society organisations in combating banditry.

Table 1*Stakeholder Roles in Combating Banditry*

Stakeholder group	Primary role	Frequency	Percent
Youth	Peacekeeping tournaments	321	91.7
Youth	Peace ambassadors	29	8.3
Women	Encouraging youth to resist banditry	310	88.6
Women	Participation in peacebuilding forums	40	11.4
Men	Conflict resolution	334	95.4
Men	Guidance to youth	16	4.6
Community leaders	Resolution of community disputes	312	89.1
Community leaders	Promoting adherence to rules	38	10.9
Civil society organisations	Promoting accountability	310	88.6
Civil society organisations	Promoting justice for affected people	40	11.4

The results showed a differentiated and complementary peacebuilding architecture. Youth participation was focused on peacekeeping tournaments (identified by 321 out of 350 respondents, 91.7%). Only 29 respondents (8.3%) viewed youth primarily as peace ambassadors. There is also a strong focus on tournaments, indicating that sport was a way of repeatedly bringing together young people from raid/retaliation-impacted communities. This aligns with Massawe (2021), who argued that youth inclusion can help build a culture of peace through giving youth a visible and constructive role. The main role played by women was to influence youth against banditry. 310 respondents (88.6%) identified this role and 40 respondents (11.4%) stressed participation in peace-building fora. The result confirms that women's contribution was substantial but frequently informal. Kong'ani (2024) found that women in West Pokot use family influence, social networks, and community mobilisation to sustain peace. The present study extends that finding by showing that residents viewed women's influence on youth as their most prominent anti-banditry role.

Men were predominantly associated with conflict resolution, cited by 334 respondents (95.4%). This reflects the formal authority of male elders in pastoral governance and inter-community negotiation. The smaller proportion that identified men as guiding youth, 16 respondents (4.6%), does not mean guidance was absent. Rather, it indicates that respondents distinguished formal dispute settlement from everyday mentoring. Muthama et al. (2021) similarly found that gender shapes the level and form of participation in community conflict resolution. Community leaders were primarily regarded as dispute resolvers, with 312 respondents (89.1%) identifying this role. Civil society organisations were mainly regarded as accountability actors, with the same proportion, 310 respondents (88.6%), identifying accountability as their central contribution. The results indicate that there is an informal division of labour between traditional leaders and civil society, with traditional leaders in charge of their relationship and disputes, and civil society stressing transparency, justice, and oversight. Kasera (2025) established that peacebuilding by civil society, characterised by its local presence and accountability and sustained political involvement, is most effective.

The stakeholder pattern proved to be a strength as it tapped into already known roles within the culture. There were risks in it as well. With age-based decision making, male elders may mobilise women and youth without them participating in decision making. If community leaders are active in political or livestock networks, then the ability to carry out their dispute resolution function is undermined. Rather, the effectiveness of the institutions relies on measures to prevent elite capture and a conscious effort to involve youth and women in formal peace institutions.

4.1.2 Awareness of Community Security Initiatives

Table 2 presents respondents' awareness of National Police Service community policing, Kenya Defence Forces deployment, and Nyumba Kumi initiatives.

Table 2*Community Awareness of Security Initiatives*

Initiative	Yes, n (%)	No, n (%)
National Police Service community policing	159 (45.4)	191 (54.6)
Kenya Defence Forces deployment	91 (26.0)	259 (74.0)
Nyumba Kumi initiatives	317 (90.6)	33 (9.4)

Awareness varied considerably across the three initiatives. Nyumba Kumi was the most visible community-security structure, recognised by 317 respondents (90.6%). This high recognition may stem from its neighbourhoodness and regular engagement with chiefs, assistant chiefs, and local inhabitants that it has. Nyumba Kumi is not a one-off but is continuously within the daily framework of the community organisation. A total of 159 respondents (45.4%) were aware of a National Police Service community-policing initiative, while 191 (54.6%) were not aware of it. That

discovery indicates that a move toward “people-centred policing” is underdeveloped. Gjelsvik (2020) characterised community policing in Kenya as a reform with a less consistent practical implementation. The findings showed that more than half of the respondents (54.6%) reported no visible NPS community-policing presence, despite community policing being a national policy.

The lowest awareness was deployment by the Kenya Defence Forces, with 91 respondents (26.0%). This may be due to the targeted nature of military deployment in hotspot areas and also a perception of multi-agency operations among residents as a single government effort rather than recognising individual agencies. Low awareness did not necessarily indicate that the intervention was absent or ineffective; rather, it was not consistently visible across the sampled communities. The awareness gradient reveals institutional distance. Initiatives were more recognised the closer they were to the life of the neighbourhood. This bolsters the Institutional Theory approach to whether an arrangement becomes an element of everyday security practice or not, as the process is influenced by cultural-cognitive familiarity and local legitimacy. As locally embedded structures might have more relational access, formal agencies might have more coercive capacity.

4.1.3 Perceived Effectiveness and Required Improvements

Table 3 presents respondents’ ratings of the effectiveness of community policing.

Table 3

Perceived Effectiveness of Community Policing

Rating	Frequency	Percent
Very effective	159	45.4
Effective	155	44.3
Neutral	36	10.3
Total	350	100.0

Table 4 presents the improvements respondents considered most important for strengthening community policing.

Table 4

Suggested Improvements to Community Policing

Suggested improvement	Frequency	Percent
Adequate training for National Police Service officers	273	78.0
Improved salaries for National Police Service officers	77	22.0
Total	350	100.0

The effectiveness of community policing was rated very highly. A total of 159 respondents (45.4%) rated it very effective, and 155 (44.3%) rated it effective. Respondents (314 respondents or 89.7%) were positive, and 36 (10.3%) were neutral. No respondent selected an ineffective category in the data. The results indicated very high community confidence in collective security arrangements. This positive scoring matches the reported links between locally-focused policing and enhanced information sharing, visibility, and satisfaction. Chachah et al. (2024) linked community policing with enhanced delivery of the National Police Service. Badiora (2025) also expressed the idea that community co-creation contributes to the sustainability of the security of the community. The positive ratings in the North Rift could be due to the preference of dialogue, peace committees, local patrols, and elder engagement as means of resolutions instead of conventional enforcement.

Perception of effectiveness cannot, however, be assumed to exact a direct correlation with either a decline in banditry or successful prosecution. Opinions may have been based on the positive effects of cooperation, sense of tranquility, mediation, and relationship with officials within the community. These are all critical, but not conviction levels or the rupture of networks or of long-term declines in armed attacks. Importantly, the qualitative evidence provided later indicated that there were both positive general perceptions and barriers to providing evidence. The most common proposed improvement was training, which 273 respondents (78.0%) identified. The result reflects that the citizens were not satisfied with community policing as an alternative to professional policing. Officers needed to be skilled in conflict resolution, know about the culture, have communication skills, and be able to differentiate between normal pastoral movement and criminal activity. Ardhiansyah et al. (2025) also related the effectiveness of community policing to institutional design and collaborative processes.

Improved salaries were proposed by 77 respondents (22.0%). Although this was a minority view, it reflected concern that poor remuneration could contribute to demoralisation, absenteeism, and corruption. Together, the findings indicate that the quality of the formal police service influences community participation. Without properly trained,

resourced, and accountable officers, community structures can provide local knowledge and legitimacy but cannot independently deliver the full criminal justice response.

4.1.4 Institutional Constraints Revealed by Qualitative Evidence

Qualitative evidence showed a paradox. Community participation and collaboration were positively assessed at programme level, but justice actors described cooperation in individual banditry cases as limited. A magistrate described the code of silence as follows:

"I preside over cases where everyone in the courtroom knows who committed the offence. Victims know. The accused's neighbours know. But when called to testify, witnesses become blind and deaf." (Magistrate [PM-004], Keiyo North Law Courts, KII, 10 December 2025).

Fear, kinship ties, and lack of confidence in witness protection were cited as reasons for the code of silence. A law-enforcement officer reported that communities knew the bandits and the locations of hidden weapons but withheld information because witnesses faced threats, assault, and livestock theft (OCS [LE-005], Keiyo South, KII, 26 November 2025).

Non-reporting should therefore not be interpreted simply as lack of civic responsibility; it may be a rational response to the power of armed networks and weak state protection.

Witness intimidation was described as pervasive. A prosecutor estimated that intimidation affected approximately 80% of the banditry cases handled and included direct threats, harm to relatives, property destruction, and disappearance of witnesses (Prosecutor [PM-006], Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Baringo, KII, 4 December 2025).

These experiences weakened evidence in rural banditry cases, where forensic evidence was limited and prosecutions often depended on eyewitness testimony.

"Witness intimidation is the single greatest obstacle to successful prosecution." (Area Commander [LE-001], North Rift Region, KII, 25 November 2025).

Community collaboration created personal risk because informants and witnesses lacked dependable protection. A magistrate reported that requests for relocation and identity protection in banditry cases were rarely approved because of resource constraints (Magistrate [PM-003], Keiyo South Law Courts, KII, 2 December 2025). *A senior prosecution counsel added that non-disclosure, in-camera testimony, and police escorts offered only short-term protection and did not protect witnesses' families at home* (Senior Prosecution Counsel [PM-007], Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Baringo, KII, 5 December 2025).

This revealed a gap between the legal framework and operational practice.

Court delays compounded the problem. Key informants attributed delays to witness non-appearance, missing files, repeated adjournments, insufficient judicial personnel, and transport constraints (Chief Magistrate [PM-001], Iten Law Courts, KII, 9 December 2025). *As cases were prolonged, witnesses lost interest or became more vulnerable to intimidation, while memories, documents, photographs, and exhibits deteriorated* (Prosecutor [PM-006], Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Baringo South, KII, 4 December 2025). Oyiembo et al. (2025)

Similarly linked prosecutorial effectiveness in complex security cases to coordination, evidence management, and institutional resources.

Community receptiveness to reintegration also varied. A senior probation officer reported that some communities accepted reformed offenders through the support of elders and religious leaders, while others remained hostile (Senior Probation Officer [PO-002], North Rift Region, KII, 8 December 2025). *A county probation officer further cautioned that some elders facilitated peace and reintegration while others were suspected of benefiting from banditry networks* (County Probation Officer [PO-001], Baringo County, KII, 11 December 2025).

The same institution of elder authority could therefore support reintegration or protect criminal interests. This finding confirms Paffenholz's (2015) warning that local ownership must be accompanied by accountability. The qualitative findings explain why high programme ratings did not guarantee strong justice outcomes. Community collaboration was effective in dialogue, dispute management and peace mobilisation, but weaker where cooperation required residents to confront armed or politically connected offenders. Sustainable collaboration, therefore, requires protection, timely justice and confidence that reported information will lead to fair and effective action.

4.2 Inferential Analysis

Table 5 summarises the correlation and chi-square results for the principal community-collaboration variables.

Table 5*Inferential Results for Community Collaboration*

Relationship tested	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
ADR use and community-policing effectiveness	Pearson $r = .008$	.877	No significant linear relationship
Government-intervention and community-policing effectiveness	Spearman's $\rho = .262$	< .001	Small-to-moderate positive association
Nyumba Kumi and community-policing effectiveness	$\chi^2(4) = 12.759$	.013	Significant; interpret cautiously
NPS presence and community-policing effectiveness	$\chi^2(2) = 66.790$	< .001	Significant association
KDF deployment and community-policing effectiveness	$\chi^2(2) = 23.509$	< .001	Significant association

The relationship between use of ADR mechanisms and community-policing effectiveness was negligible and not statistically significant, $r = .008$, $p = .877$. Only 0.0064% of the variance in community-policing effectiveness was associated with variation in ADR use. This means respondents who reported ADR use were neither more nor less likely to rate community policing positively. The result indicates that customary dispute resolution and community policing were operating as parallel rather than integrated institutional domains. In contrast, ratings of government intervention effectiveness were positively associated with community-policing effectiveness, Spearman's $\rho = .262$, $p < .001$. The relationship was statistically significant but modest, accounting for approximately 6.9% shared variance. The finding suggests that confidence in formal government action and confidence in community policing reinforced one another, while remaining distinct. Badiora's (2025) co-creation argument is supported because community participation appears more credible when state institutions are perceived as capable.

Nyumba Kumi awareness was significantly associated with perceived community-policing effectiveness, $\chi^2(4, N = 350) = 12.759$, $p = .013$. However, 44.4% of cells had expected counts below five, so the result must be interpreted cautiously. The direction of the cross-tabulation was nevertheless positive: most respondents who were aware of Nyumba Kumi rated community policing effective or very effective. The association involving National Police Service presence was much stronger, $\chi^2(2, N = 350) = 66.790$, $p < .001$. Respondents who reported an NPS presence were substantially more likely to rate community policing very effective. Kenya Defence Forces deployment was also significantly associated with higher effectiveness ratings, $\chi^2(2, N = 350) = 23.509$, $p < .001$. These results show that community collaboration was not perceived as an alternative to formal security capacity. It was viewed as more effective when state security actors were visible and engaged. The inferential evidence and qualitative themes should be read together. State presence strengthened positive perceptions, but state institutions also needed to protect witnesses and process cases promptly. This visible deployment in the absence of a procedure might reinforce a sense of 'security in the short term' but not eliminate organised criminality. The study thus contributes in terms of identifying collaborators' legitimacy, their presence and their consequences in operational justice.

4.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The study provides a call-to-action explanation of community collaboration as a layered system of institutional structures, supported by empirical findings. It demonstrates differences between functions of various groups, the deeper penetration of Nyumba Kumi than formal agency programmes, and a positive community-policing perception relating to the presence of the state. It also recognises that there are ways in which collaboration fails after the reporting stage, such as witness intimidation and justice delays. This is an addition to the assumption that community participation will automatically lead to better security. The combined effect of local legitimacy, police officer professionalism, and police procedural guarantees is most efficient. As community-based structures are capable of dialogue and on-the-ground intelligence, they are not able to prosecute politically protected or heavily armed networks on their own. This distinction is crucial for other criminal justice policies in other regions that are marginalised and affected by conflict.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**5.1 Conclusion**

The study found that community cooperation in the North Rift followed a very intricate multi-stakeholder system. Youth, women, men, community leaders and civil society organisations played complementary roles. Nyumba Kumi was the most successful known program, and community policing had outstanding positive appraisals. Perceived effectiveness of community-policing was positively associated with government intervention, NPS presence, and KDF deployment. Nevertheless, perceived effectiveness was not equivalent to complete criminal justice effectiveness. Reporting and prosecution were limited by the code of silence, the widespread intimidation of witnesses, inadequate witness protection, limitations on evidence and judicial delay. In this regard, while community involvement was beneficial in mobilising for peace, dialogue, and for purposes of understanding and local dispute resolution and

confidence building, it proved to be inadequate as a standalone tool to deconstruct the organised networks of banditry. Its sustainability is reliant on integration with trusted, well-resourced and accountable formal institutions.

5.2 Recommendations

The Kenyan government should be able to support and formalise Nyumba Kumi, with the right policies and funding, and formal ties with security and justice institutions. Reporting procedures, records, and referrals of less local validity should be standardised, but their local legitimacy is to be retained. Every police officer deployed in the banditry-infested areas should undergo regular and special training in cultural intelligence, conflict management, law enforcement, and community engagement by the National Police Service. Joint training with elders, peace committees and women's groups, and youth representatives should be provided. A confidential and adequately resourced witness-protection and informant-support system should be made accessible in the North Rift. Following a serious report, the process of risk assessment, relocation and communication with prosecutors should start in a timely way.

The use of community peace structures should be accompanied by mechanisms that can limit elite capture and the inclusion of leaders who are involved in livestock theft networks and arms networks. Women and youth should not be mobilising agents but should be serving as decision makers. Security agencies, prosecutors and courts should hold case-review meetings on a regular basis to facilitate community information to be utilised as evidence before the courts and reduce delays. Success of collaboration should not be measured on positive perception ratings alone but based on results, such as the number of reports, the number of protected witnesses, the number of livestock recovered, the number of cases closed, and successful reintegration.

Declaration of Interest

The author declares that he does not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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