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## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY POLICING: PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND DISPUTE HANDLING ROLES

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**Abstract.** Effective policing requires the active involvement of the local community. To engage the community, the Addis Ababa Police Commission implemented the community policy with the objectives of identifying inclusive problems in the community and managing social disputes. This study assessed the importance of the community policing program by using a qualitative research approach to collect detailed information. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The study found that involving community residents in community policing helped police departments identify the problem and manage disputes at the community level. This enabled the resolution of critical and serious problems that require detailed police intervention. As a result of community engagement, beyond reducing the burden on the police department, empowering citizens in managing social disputes promotes a culture of proactive problem-solving among residents at the grassroots level. The study advocates for a review of conventional approaches by social work to empower communities to include citizen empowerment and empowerment programs to reduce structural barriers. Accordingly, the study suggests that the Addis Ababa Police Commission should intensively implement community policing in different divisions of the police commission.

**Keywords:** *Community Policing, Dispute Handling, Problem Identification, Social Work.*

**Rezumat.** Munca eficientă a poliției necesită implicarea activă a comunității locale. Pentru a participa comunitatea, Comisia de Poliție din Addis Abeba a implementat politica comunitară cu obiective de identificare a problemelor inclusive în comunitate și gestionarea disputelor sociale. Acest studiu a evaluat importanța programului de poliție comunitară prin abordarea cercetării calitative pentru a colecta informații detaliate. Datele calitative au fost colectate prin interviuri semi-structurate și discuții focus-grup. Studiul a identificat faptul că implicarea rezidenților comunității în poliția comunitară a ajutat departamentele de poliție să identifice problema și să gestioneze disputele la nivel de comunitate. Acest lucru a permis rezolvarea problemelor critice și grave care necesită intervenția detaliată a poliției. În rezultatul angajamentului comunității, dincolo de reducerea sarcinii asupra departamentului de poliție, mandatarea cetățenilor în gestionarea disputelor sociale promovează cultura de a rezolva în

mod proactiv problemele din rândul rezidenților la nivel de bază. Studiul promovează revizuirea abordărilor convenționale de către asistența socială în vederea împuternicirii comunității pentru a include programe de încadrare și emancipare a cetățenilor în vederea reducerii barierelor structurale. În consecință, studiul sugerează Comisiei de poliție din Addis Abeba implementarea intensivă a poliției comunitare în diferite divizii ale comisiei de poliție.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Poliție comunitară, Gestionarea litigiilor, Identificarea problemelor, Asistență socială.*

## 1. Introduction

Crime is a global challenge that threatens not only safety and security of communities but also a major cause that may destabilize the social, economic and political function of institutions in nation-states [1]. As the development of cities increase, the magnitude, types, level and frequency of criminal acts also increases. Specifically, in cities of developing countries where there is a considerable level of economic and social problems, the level of crime is seen as significantly hampering day to day activities of residents [2]. Governments across the globe, hence, established several institutions to enhance the normal functioning of people both individually and collectively [3]. As Schnebly [4] noted, different countries across the world employ different approaches of policing depending on the nature and definition of crime retained in a particular setting. One of these approaches is community policing.

Community policing was introduced to balance the involvement of community residents in the very activity of police departments at various levels [4-6]. Accordingly, as Hancock [7] noted, many police agencies are now implementing the philosophy of community policing with varied levels and span of interest. Recently, community policing is gaining acceptance among many countries of the world including Ethiopia, however, their methods of implementation vary from country to country and from place to place [8].

The involvement of community residents in maintaining local peace is not unique to modern society. Rather, community involvement in ensuring stability was the peculiar feature of ancient egalitarian communities [9]. Community policing ethos allows the police and the community to work together in partnership to solve crime related problems proactively. The philosophy of community policing advocates that success can be attained when there is genuine partnership, cooperation and active participation in problem-solving among the police, communities, stakeholders and other role players [10]. There is no, nonetheless, marked difference in terms of acknowledging the importance of working in close collaboration with the community residents.

However, despite its growing importance, consensus has not yet been reached concerning the meaning and essential ingredients constituting community policing. Legesse, Mekonen and Genetu [11] pointed out that the successful implementation of community policing depends on the commitment of both the police and the community. Community policing is based on the premise that police alone cannot control crime and promote residents' quality of life [12]. To this end sharing power and empowering the local community to deal with crime related problems effectively is imperative. Effective policing demands active participation and engagement of the local community and other stakeholders.

Community policing, as philosophy and strategy of policing, is a relatively recent phenomena in Ethiopia. The concept of community policing has mainly taken from practices of USA and UK. Community policing has appeared in Ethiopia as "transformative model" and

a key step for police and community to work together to solve crime related problems and social and physical disorder. Ethiopian Federal Police Commission (EFPC) gave attention to community policing emphasizing on community participation in the process of preventing crime and criminal threats and ensuring the prevalence of peace and security. Currently, Addis Ababa Police Commission (AAPC) implemented the community policing in all police stations in Addis Ababa. This study examined the roles of community empowerment in community policing at Ketena level in Addis Ababa.

The AAPC community policing implementation manual indicated that community policing programs should facilitate the establishment and proper functioning of structures at grassroots level to enhance residents' capacity of dealing with issues at local level. Accordingly, residents at provided with power to deal disputes and minor disagreements in the community. Settling disputes of any kind was previously a mandate given to the police department. Police departments, before the implementation of community policing, were overwhelmed in dealing with minor disagreements. Many people used to visit police stations even for minor misunderstandings during conversation. To this end, many people used to visit formal government structures such as the police to settle social or civil disputes. Involvements of police departments in settling minor disputes have had serious consequences on its overall performance because minor disputes had stolen a great deal of time that would have otherwise been used to attend other major criminal offenses. Besides, the routine nature of such issues had also made police officers to show leniency in addressing those issues. This, as a result, had resulted in many criminal offenses that incurred damage to human life, body and property. However, the probability of these minor disagreements causing a major criminal offence is immense, if not addressed early. Moreover, duties and mandates of advisory council in relation to settling civil disputes are clearly indicated in the AAPC community policing implementation manual.

The community policing programs empowered community representatives to handle social disputes that arise among community. In fact, settling disputes is not new to communities; instead, it is very common that different informal social association and religion-based organizations involve in disputes handling and settling community level in the study area. However, these entities are not be equally accessible to all community because they are structured based on religion or society. As a result, these organizations have limitations to settle social disputes non-members of the social groups. This study assessed community policing practices at Addis Ababa Policing Commission and community role in handling social disputes. In addition, this article assessed practices of community contribution in problem identification.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This study applied a qualitative research design with an aim of gaining detailed information from small group of participants. In addition, we implemented a case study approach for methodological purposes with an intention of providing an in-depth examination policing program. Accordingly, participants purposefully selected from different community groups that involve in community policing in the selected subcity in Add Ababa. This group of community members including youth, community advisory councils and committees of community policing structure. The participants were included in the in-depth interviews. In addition, officers from different levels were also included to assess their views with community groups and implementation of community policing and the role of community policing in dispute handling and problem identification.

As a qualitative data collection tools, this article used key informant interview, focus group discussions (FGDs). Additional data were collected from diverse set of sources; including policy documents and organizational reports. By applying purposive sampling, this study selected 22 participants for the interview and FGD. These participants include 6 community residents, 7 members of advisory council, and 9 police officers. The result of data collected is narrated qualitatively.

### **3. Results**

At Ketena level, community policing programs facilitated active and genuine engagement of residents to take part in identifying and prioritizing major community concerns. Accordingly, citizens at Ketena level are delegated the power to define and prioritize major problems in the neighborhood. Structures above Ketena, however, are technically closed for active and meaningful engagement of residents to participate in problem definition and priority setting activities. Local government officials occupying Woreda and Sub-city advisory council positions are contributing few to at least consult community residents about major community concerns and potential remedies to address problems.

The advisory council with responsibility of settling civil dispute at the community level is directly elected by residents. This helped to earn trust from community enabling conformity among parties in dispute. The member of advisory council represents the community with diversified characteristics including religion, age, and social group. Blocks in community policing are formulated based on social and economic characteristics. The blocks have representative that involve in problem definition and prioritizing. The representatives of blocks present problems the community faces. Accordingly, the community residents participate directly in identifying and prioritizing concerns. Through committee, the residents report the problems to advisory council and, then, the advisory council prioritizes the problems. Ultimately, the police department of respective woreda evaluates the problems.

The power of the council is limited to social issues; hence; crime related issues included physical injury are not included in the mandates of the council. Therefore, the community engage in community policing programs through identifying and defining community concerns. The community policing structure includes advisory council that have mandate to monitor disputes arising within community residents. The advisory council refers the conflicting issues to woreda community policing structure when the issues are beyond mandate of the council. This happens very rarely and residents wanted to resolve differences in service priorities at Ketena level. The woreda community policing structure will decide on the matter. In addition, the police department usually refers activities in community policing to decide on differences among the community.

This study identified that social disputes are very common in the community area at different contexts and levels. The move from the police department to delegate civil dispute management to community representatives has brought practical benefits for the community. The mandates given to community representatives have several implications for residents at community level. The dispute handling at the community level encourages the parties to compromise their interest to solve their difference and to keep their social interaction. The community policing enabled the residents to overcome minor disagreements without harming the existing social interactions, helping residents avoid disputes immediately, preventing further escalations and ensuring solidarity among community residents. However, majority of the issues that at community level are minor in nature.

The social dispute resolution procedures at community level are also crucial in preventing the unnecessary confrontation between police officers and community members during disputes. In collaboration with the community policing officers, residents identify community interest. The number of instances caused due to disagreement between police officers and the community were reduced because of community participation in the policing activities.

The council is empowered to facilitate the process of solving multitude of disputes that doesn't entail criminal element. During social dispute settlement, the interest of parties in the dispute is maintained with the right to refer the issue to police station. However, the parties prefer settling the disputes at community level. This study further identified that there are few occasions that disputes were not solved at community level. In the study area, the advisory council reports the cases and decisions made at the community level to the police department. This is intended to understand the nature, causes and type of social disputes at the community. In addition, it has aim to inform the police officers that the dispute resolution process account of events if the disputes are linked to crime.

There are different cases where the interests of one community contrasts to interests of other community. As an example, the participants indicated that services from cinemas one community are sources of different problems in other community. The noises from the cinemas highly disturbing for the local community. In contrast, income from the cinema services is source of livelihood in the other community. The participants raised an additional example which is related chewing khat. The discussion has shown that although chewing Khat is source of social and security issue through addiction limits work motives, there are significant number of community members that use the khat for work.

The conflict of interest of society is managed through recurrent dialogue among the communities with contrasting interest. For this purpose, advisory council in community policing mediates issues comprising differences through facilitation of discussion sessions. In addition, the council collects observations from community groups to their interest and provide suggestions on the issue. The suggestions of the advisory council are designed to benefit majority of the society with no or minimal impact on the other group. The differences are settled based on recurrent face to face discussion among communities with conflicting interests. As a result, the community policing helped to easily handle social disputes. In addition, the community policing helped the police department to make appropriate decision by providing relevant information and displaying interest of the society. In the above cases, the community policing activities suggested the policing department not to ban economic activities for single concern.

Another way to conceptualize the agency of role community policing program is to identify and utilize resources in addressing community concerns. The data collected from in-depth interview participants, in general, revealed that community policing programs had a crucial role in promoting the efficient allocation of idle resources. First, the resource allocation is indicated by exploring idle resource and providing suggestions to utilize the resources. Several study participants depicted that community policing programs were vital in helping residents explore resources in the neighborhood relevant to address major concerns in the neighborhood. This article shows that active police-community consultations were conducted to address major community concerns in the neighborhood. Beyond identifying problems, residents were also fully allowed to look for potential remedies to deal with identified problems.

However, deciding on which community concerns should first be dealt with was a great challenge in the route of aligning local problems with local resources. There was marked discrepancy between problems identified and resources recommended to address problems. For instance, residents identified multitude of problems including unemployment, prostitution, and absence of leisure place. In contrast, vacant lands in the neighborhood were the only resource identified as a remedy to address problems in the community. Moreover, different segments in the community have had divergent interests about how to utilize the available community resource. For instance, the unemployed youth wanted vacant lands for providing parking services, whereas other community members particularly women urged advisory council to allow them built small shops.

The advisory council played a crucial role in reconciling divergent interests among different community groups. The council had facilitated several community dialogue sessions at neighborhood level to reach at common understanding towards utilization of resources at community level. Furthermore, the council attempted to consider other options beyond relying merely on community groups' recommendation. Accordingly, after recurrent discussions with residents and community groups, consensus had been reached to solicit the available vacant lands for associations interested to provide parking and shower services. The advisory council realized that the available community resources, e.g., vacant land, to be utilized in a manner that promote both employment opportunities and also address major community concerns in the neighborhood. Besides, the council also focused on services that benefit both providers and users. Accordingly, since the environmental hygiene was a major challenge in the neighborhood and the council helped interested women that engaged in prostitution to join the association providing shower and toilet services.

The parking association was primarily designed to serve the unemployed youth in the community. Parking was also another major problem in the neighborhood as the place is located in one of the busiest markets in the whole nation. Hence, the advisory council took this as an advantage to mobilize and utilize the available vacant lands for parking services. The local youth, through the advisory council, were mobilized in parking association and are still earning income that supports their livelihoods.

The administrative issues, however, were not easy for several reasons. First, despite the vacant lands are located in the neighborhood, it is the local government that administer the land. Thus, getting permission from the local government was challenging as there were plans by the administration for other services. Second, convincing women engaged in prostitution to take part in an association that provide shower and toilet services was extremely challenging. The women have had an immense interest to quit the commercial sex work. However, the money earned from shower and toilet association was totally incomparable with the money earned from the prostitution to support their livelihood. Consequently, the number of women, who were once active in the shower and toilet association, is declining and they are now returning to the commercial sex business.

Second, the resource allocation role of implementing the community policing is indicated by mentoring the activities of associations established at community level. This article depicts that advisory council has been playing an active role in monitoring and supporting the performance of associations. Although associations are officially reporting to the local government structure, advisory council keeps playing a central role in advising members all matters that affect their success. The advisory council helps associations function better through facilitating a smooth working environment. In addition, the advisory

council encourages members of the association to save some amount of their monthly dividends. The local administration also urges members to strengthen their savings. Members of the association are supportive to advice from advisory council. Moreover, advisory council guides associations to expand their service span to earn better income. For example, beyond providing shower and toilet services, advisory council advised women to deliver other services such as making coffee and selling mobile cards. Besides, facilitating the nomination and inclusion of new members is also the other important role that the advisory council performing in relation to associations at neighborhood level.

However, result of in-depth interview shows that the Ketana advisory council is now playing a minimal role in regulating the activities of associations at community level. Accordingly, it was shown that the advisory council is no longer influential to mentor associations, particularly the parking association. The interview presented evidence that many of the youth in the parking association are defiant to advisory council and even to the local administration to include new unemployed youth in the association. The youth in the parking association are mainly focused on collecting money and they are not even providing kind services to the customers. In some instances, it is possible to observe the youth intimidating and harassing customers. Further, it was indicated that the youth are not actually actively engaged in providing parking services. Rather they informally involve third party (usually little kids) and the role of members of the association youth is just to collect money from those kids on daily bases. Moreover, it was reported that many of the youth in the parking association already have other permanent sources of income and the money they are earning from the parking association extra to their basic income. This, not only manifests the inability of advisory council to regulate associations, but also blocking many unemployed youths in the neighborhood from earning income.

#### **4. Discussion**

Problem identification and prioritizing is a long process. Involvement of community in this process helps the policing department to reduce number of tasks. The finding of this study revealed that community policing programs were crucial in nurturing the culture of dialogue among residents concerning major community problems at neighborhood level. Moreover, the program installed an essential platform through which residents weekly discuss on matters of local peace and security. The problem definition process at Block and Ketana levels was better in representing and bargaining multiple interests within the community. The community dialogue sessions, commonly referred as beat meetings in community policing, are important ingredients to establish partnership and solve problems at community level. The discussion forums are vital to initiate community dialogue about major causes and potential remedies to address problems. These forums in community policing, however, are mainly portrayed as part of police officers' strategy to stay connected with the community residents. The community meetings have diminished or no influence over the entire police service provision in the study area. This is mainly due to the fact that the meetings are not structurally integrated with police units, other than community policing. Thus, beyond negotiating with community policing officers at community level dialogues practices have limited relevance in promoting change above the community.

In line with this, Chakraborty [13] revealed that regular meetings with community residents have important role in fostering the relationship between community residents and the police department and addressing problems of crime and disorder at community level.

Similarly, Dessalegn [14] indicated that community meetings have promoted positive interaction and in some instance trust between residents and the police department. Topping [15] revealed that community policing provides a relatively better platform that promote citizens at grassroots level to forward diverse interests concerning the police service. The community policing programs are efficient in representing the service needs and priorities of community. Moreover, Kocak [16] concluded that community policing facilitated both proactive problem identification and co-production solutions that are in-reach of community residents. Rukus, Warner and Zhang [17] similarly reported that community policing programs are strongly correlated with active community engagement in problem identification, particularly in urban context.

The social dispute resolution activities are outcomes of the community policing programs. Different efforts were made to institutionalize the dispute settlement activities at community level. The community policing programs have set the foundation that help residents settle disputes that do not have an element of crime. Hence, the community engagement in the community policing helped to display different features of single issue. Accordingly, the police department uses the multiple characteristics of problem for effective decision making. In addition, the community participation helps to raise the awareness of residents to function responsibly, without causing harm and discomfort to others. Civil dispute settlement practices within the framework of community policing, on the hand, is serving as a bridge connecting various informal structures, producing a more complete quasi-formal structure that function beyond social and demographic boundaries.

Devolving real power to citizens to settle civil disputes constitutes an essential element of empowerment since residents' input towards problem-solving are integrated in the overall effort to maintain order in the neighborhood. Carr [18] evidenced that community empowerment through community policing is the most efficient avenues to deal with dispute that may arise amongst community members. Delegating community residents is an efficient method to facilitate collective action and address civil disputes. Baker [19] argued that community-based policing has had a vital role in establishing a working relationship with the police department in the overall efforts to prevent and/or settle disputes. Community policing provide a relatively better platform to address intra-community disputes, without straining social relation among community members. Pandey [20] argued that community policing has served as an important platform in the course of installing resilience in the very structure of communities.

## **5. Conclusions**

This article identified two major outcomes achieved as a result of community policing implementation. First, mandating citizens to handle social disputes promotes the community to proactively solve problems among residents. Second, the community policing enabled the reducing the burden on the police department, and preventing unnecessary waste of time, money and other resources that would be spent to proceed in the legal process. Community dialogue practiced following community policing structure have enabled residents to exercise power within the framework of community policing implementation although the problem definition processes are still beyond the reach of community residents.

Community policing programs through establishment of community discussion forums are playing a central role in enhancing the capacity of community residents to identify problems and setting service priorities. The community groups, through advisory council have



been provided the power to deal with social/civil disputes at community level. In this context, it is evident that community policing implementations have successfully transferred power to community groups to address their own issues. Community policing programs have different implication for police departments through problem identification and dispute handling. The findings from this article came-up with an insight that urges social work to revisit the conventional approaches of policing to include other program implementations including community policing in the course of framing emancipation of people from structural barriers. Community policing programs provide additional platform for policing activities about community residents could be engaged in community concerns to improve conventional policing tasks. The study indicated that community policing programs in AAPC have multiple implications through participation of community residents. The study also identified that community policing programs have varying role in terms of empowering the capacity of residents to deal with major concerns at community level.

This article provides additional framework for social work practices wherein community policing programs could be used to incorporate the voices of citizens in the overall activities of the police department. Community policing programs, hence, could serve as the best avenue for social work practitioner to frame grass-root participation of communities in community governance activities. However, practices of ensuring accountability and transparency are not sufficiently examined in this study and hence, demand detailed exploration in future studies. Furthermore, potential measures to improve community's control over community policing programs shall be subjected for further scholarly inquiries.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest

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