

# The community policing improved policy-community relations Addis Ababa city administration

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**Abstract:** *The most common crimes in the community and how to respond to them in picture In another community, following complaints by the block committees that crime was being facilitated by a lack of light during night time, as well as an abundance of places to hide, the Community Police Officer organized blocks to hang lights outside their properties on a rotating basis (so that the cost of doing so was shared) and so that criminals would be deterred from the neighborhoods. Similarly, the community was organized to clean up the neighborhood, for instance by removing rubbish and clearing bushes that would provide cover for criminals. In the same community, the Community Police Officer has tried to incentivize community participation in such initiatives by assigning each block a grade depending on the level of crime in the neighborhoods, the extent to which the community participates in community policing activities and how clean they keep the neighborhoods. The grades are publically displayed and blocks compete to get better grades. Elsewhere, Community Police Officers have done simple things to improve their relations Addis Ababa city administration hips with communities, like providing feedback forms that are publically displayed outside the Community Police Office so that peoples' experiences of using the office are publicized, acting as both a 'naming and shaming' exercise and encouraging others to use the office on the basis of demonstrated positive experiences. Notwithstanding their social, political, or cultural background, the vast majority of people desire to live in a prosperous, peaceful community. Everybody finds it difficult to thrive and develop into their best selves if they don't have a basic need for safety and belonging. To foster that sense of security and tranquility, police enforcement must interact with the community in which they both live and work.*

**Keyword-** community, policing, policy,-relations, Addis Ababa, administration

## Introduction

Perhaps the way in which community policing in Addis Ababa has been most effective is in improving police-community relations Addis Ababa city administration. While there is still some amount of distrust and fear of police by the community, interviews suggested that overwhelmingly public opinion of police has improved since the introduction of community policing (Muluneh, no date). This is reflected, in part, by stories told by Community Police Officers about the cold reception with which they were received by the communities at the beginning of community policing, to the manner in which community members talked about their Community Police Officers now being 'part of the community', 'sharing our joy and our grief' and being invited to participate in community events. Moreover, as part of the End Child Marriage Campaign in Addis Ababa, it was reported that every *kebele* with a Community Police Officer nominated him to fill the position of Community Conversation Facilitator (a community volunteer who leads on speaking with parents of girls to be married). This suggests that people see their Community Police Officers as respected community representatives.

These strengthened community-police relations Addis Ababa city administration hips have been built in part by the innovation shown by individual Community Police Officers who operate with extremely limited financial resources or support. In one community visited, the Community Police Officer had developed hand-drawn manuals for illiterate community members depicting the most common crimes in the community and how to respond to them in pictures. In another community, following complaints by the block committees that crime was being facilitated by a lack of light during night time, as well as an abundance of places to hide, the Community Police Officer organized blocks to hang lights outside their properties on a rotating basis (so that the cost of doing so was shared) and so that criminals would be deterred from the neighborhoods. Similarly, the community was organized to clean up the neighborhood, for instance by removing rubbish and clearing bushes that would provide cover for criminals. In the same community, the Community Police Officer has tried to incentivize community participation in such initiatives by assigning each block a grade depending on the level of crime in the neighborhoods, the extent to which the community participates in community policing activities and how clean they keep the neighborhoods. The grades are publically displayed and blocks compete to get better grades. Elsewhere, Community Police Officers have done simple things to improve their relations Addis Ababa city administration hips with communities, like providing feedback forms that are publically displayed outside the Community Police Office so that peoples' experiences of using the office are publicized, acting as both a 'naming and shaming' exercise and encouraging others to use the office on the basis of demonstrated positive experiences. A range of social service functions also seem to be played by Community Police Officers and initiatives that fall outside of a traditional policing purview include the organization of literacy and numeracy training for community members, and skills training or setting up small businesses (like car parks and coffee stalls) for unemployed youth. Such initiatives were often cited by community members as evidence of how Community Police Officers were making genuine efforts to contribute to the life of the community. It is not clear that this positive opinion of Community Police Officers always extends to the Regional or Federal Police more broadly, but it is a start.

Of course, the big question in the Ethiopian context, given the overarching national objective that community policing has taken on there, is whether it has contributed to development (and indeed, what ‘contributing to development’ in fact means). This was beyond the scope of this case study to examine but given donor interest in similar questions (ie, whether improved security leads to better development outcomes) Ethiopia may offer an interesting case for future research.

Community policing in Addis Ababa has, to date, been funded almost entirely by communities themselves. While the Regional Police cover the salaries of the Community Police Officers, no resources or equipment are provided outside of community contributions. To date, the Addis Ababa Regional Police Commission estimates that across the State, communities have contributed buildings and materials equivalent to 70 million Birr (approximately USD 3.7 million). While this is an impressive demonstration of communities’ willingness to contribute to community policing, every interviewee in Addis Ababa cited this as a problem for the sustainability of community policing. A small number of interviewees suggested that some community members choose not to attend community policing meetings as they know that they will be asked for financial contributions. Community members felt that, as a government policy, the government should bear some of the costs associated with the implementation of community policing.

Community Police Officers, and many of their community members, spoke of the need for transport, in particular, to enable officers to cover their *kebeles*, get to crime scenes quickly, and transport victims or crime suspects to the *woreda* police station. In some communities Advisory Councils have fundraised and purchased a motorbike for Community Police Officers, but this is rare. In addition, computers and office supplies were frequently requested to enable Community Police Officers to record crime rates and statements electronically. Two Community Police Officers also said they would like access to the internet in order to research about community policing practices internationally that may be relevant to the Addis Ababa context.

Possibilities for donor support to assist in plugging such funding gaps seem limited as community policing is not a priority under the government’s Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) – the five year development plan that sets out government priorities. In addition, the philosophy around community policing, and also the Charities and Societies Proclamation and EPRDF ideas of revolutionary democracy more broadly, is that citizens themselves should contribute to sustain what are meant to be community structures. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, interviews with Federal and Regional police revealed little interest in donor support to community policing in spite of articulated needs in this area. Without funding support from somewhere, however, it is likely that communities will suffer burnout as they are increasingly asked to make contributions from their often already small incomes. In order for community policing to continue and not to become a grudge held by the communities it is meant to serve, alternative funding sources are needed (Greene and Kebede 2012).

Another challenge commonly cited by police, civil society and community members is the need for more training. This includes training of the police, as well as of government officials and community members involved in Advisory Councils and Conflict Resolving Committees. On the part of Community Police Officers, this is due to concerns about their limited educational and training background, which can mean they are under-equipped to communicate effectively with their communities and to carry out their duties. In particular, leadership training was recommended. Particularly astonishing is that just one week is devoted to community policing in the training of Community Police Officers. Given that this is their primary function, more time needs to be spent on sensitizing new recruits to debates on the purpose and pitfalls of community policing (Greene and Kebede 2012: 51). While some Community Police Officers demonstrated impressive innovation – especially given funding constraints – a general sense was reported (by senior police rather than by community members) that officers tend to fall back in practice on traditional policing approaches and see community policing as simply an add on to that philosophy. Transforming their policing approach will clearly take more sustained training efforts. It is important, however, that this go beyond merely technical training about the principles of community policing, to practical mediation/negotiation skills that are about strengthened communication, social and leadership skills. This is particularly important when Community Police Officers, who are young high school graduates, are expected to be involved in discussions of child marriage, revenge killings, and so on. Training in such skills is not straightforward and mentoring by elders and other respected community leaders may be useful.

On the part of government officials, many interviewees felt that a lack of understanding of the purpose of community policing inhibited greater support and participation. Grievances are held, in particular, against government officials who reportedly at times refuse permission to communities to build Community Police Offices due to planning and zoning rules. Community members perceive this as a lack of understanding of the importance of community policing and the role it can play in national development. More training is also needed for community members involved in community policing. In part, this was mentioned by interviewees as a priority in order that communities understand the purpose of community police and therefore participate more actively. However, perhaps more importantly, given that community policing, as discussed above, is partly about resolving crimes and disputes through community-level arbitration, training is particularly important to ensure that this does not enforce an arbitrary customary system that actually decreases people’s ability to access security and justice, rather than increasing it. Of course, some of the community members involved in Advisory Councils and Conflict Resolving Committees are elders, who have been undertaking conflict resolution duties for generations and clearly do not need such training. However, in order to ensure that community policing provides improved security and justice outcomes to communities, sensitization on issues such as early marriage and other harmful traditional

practices, as well as women's rights may be useful in strengthening the protection of rights under customary law. Already such sensitization efforts are underway through initiatives like the End Child Marriage Programme operating in parts of Addis Ababa and there are opportunities to extend such initiatives to support protection of rights of vulnerable groups.

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