Effectiveness of the Nyumba Kumi Community Policing Initiative In Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Youth in Kenya have great potential and present a great resource with respect to sustainable development. Given an opportunity, they can and have demonstrated capability in ensuring peace and development. However, over the years, youth have been disengaged from normal productive activities in school, in the family and community. This goes on to increased youth involvement in armed crime which has only led to the death of youth, both innocent and criminals. The measures put in place to halt the prevalence of youth involvement in armed crimes have not been as successful. The Nyumba Kumi Initiative is a strategy of anchoring community policing at various levels that is household level, market, estate among others. This study is set to assess how effective the Nyumba Kumi policing initiative is in Kenya. This is in terms of governance i.e inclusivity of the youth. The study took place in Kayole, Nairobi County. Data was acquired through administering of questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews. A total of 300 questionnaires were administered. The primary data was subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis. Several key findings observed include inter alia; Lack of inclusivity of the youth in community policing initiatives. Keeping in mind that community intelligence is the best intelligence, this research would enhance the existing structures of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative for improved human security.

1. Introduction

Over the years, there has been a paradigm shift with regards to policing in many countries in the world. This is a result of the developments as well as challenges faced in the security sector. This has necessitated the need for new approaches to deal with insecurity such as community policing. The community policing initiative is not a new concept in Kenya as it was introduced in 2005. The main goal is to eliminate the fear of crime and social disorder through joint problem solving. However there have been various challenges regarding the implementation of such policing initiatives.

The prevalence of youth involvement in criminal activities has been prevalent globally over the years. There are as many as 33 000-gun related deaths every year whereby youths 24 years old and younger represent 20% of that number (Kochanek et al. 2016). According to Watson – Thompson (2008) persons under the age of 23 accounted for as much as 45% of all violent crimes arrest and 50% murder arrests in 2005. In Kenya, youth engagement in crime is prevalent

especially in hotspots such as Kayole, Dandora, Kariobangi, and Kibera among others. The measures put in place such as the Nyumba Kumi community policing initiative to halt the prevalence of youth involvement in armed crimes have not been as successful. Exclusivity of the youth in such initiatives plays a key role to its futility. Keeping in mind that the youth in Kenya present a great resource with respect to sustainable development, efforts should be geared towards youth empowerment.

The Nyumba Kumi Community policing initiative was introduced in Kenya following the Westgate terror attack in 2013. It is a strategy of anchoring community policing at the household level. It is borrowed from the Tanzanian Ujamaa Policy informed by the African ubuntu philosophy of social connectedness epitomed in the saying, 'I am because we are and because we are so I am '. The Nyumba Kumi Initiative is guided by principles inter alia equal representation of members. This however is not the case on the ground as the Nyumba Kumi is perceived to involve the elderly members of the community. Youth, being most engaged in criminal activities do not engage in Nyumba Kumi activities neither are they included in matters of crime and security of which they are at the center of.

This over time has led to a lot of friction and tension between the youth and the elders. Inclusivity of both the young and old is important to ensure effective implementation of the Nyumba Kumi.

There have been concerns as well as debates regarding the constitutionality and legality of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative. The initiative is not directly entrenched in the constitution however it is inferred under Article 244 (e). It is argued that because criminals live inside of the community, members of the community should be actively involved in preventing crime. However, to what extent should the community participate in community policing? In the absence of a structure or clearly stipulated roles and responsibility, cases of members infringing on other individuals right to privacy and right to security will be prevalent.

Inferences on the Nyumba Kumi can also be drawn from the Criminal procedure code which provides that a private person may arrest any person who in his view commits or whom he reasonably suspects of having committed a felony and persons found committing an offence involving property injury may be arrested without a warrant from the property owner. These sections therefore provide the right for a citizen to arrest a fellow citizen echoeing the concept of Nyumba Kumi. In most cases, members tend to take matters into their own hands and treat suspected criminals in a cruel and degrading manner or even instigate mob justice instead of reporting the same to the police. This deprives suspects of their right to life. The lack of constitutionality as well as community empowerment regarding alternative dispute resolution mechanisms contributes towards radical actions against suspected criminals.

The Nyumba Kumi draws membership from the public as well as the private sectors. The members are tasked with oversight of community activities and most importantly to help reduce the prevalence of criminal activities. Due to the lack of proper structures and guidelines on the Nyumba Kumi, there is a lot of confusion regarding the membership, roles and responsibilities of the community. Regulations as well as guidelines are essential in vetting of members as well as decision making. There are cases where the Nyumba Kumi elders are criminals or even cases whereby members perceive the Nyumba Kumi as a money making business. The lack of effective accountability channels also contributes towards people taking advantage of theNyumba Kumi.

Walter Otieno et al (2017) provides that the Nyumba Kumi Initiative is a strategy implemented by the government to complement community policing initiatives. County and national governments work together with the citizens in groups of 10 houses. In cases where security problems arise, the 10 neighbors come together to solve them before the issues get out of hand. Information of serious human security threats are forwarded to the administrative leaders from the village to national level.

Muchangi, Nancy (2016) provides that little effort has been put with regards to the strategies employed to ensure improved human security. The research showed that awareness of the nyumba kumi initiative is necessary to ensure performance in security. It also shows that the general public and the authorities are reluctant to understand the Nyumba Kumi initiative. This is a barrier to the implementation of a strategy that could offer positive contribution towards improved human security in Kenya. Publicity, training and sensitization of the same is important to improve awareness and enable the citizens to be confident in the strategy. This article is set to look at the various loopholes in the Nyumba Kumi initiative and compare the same with countries that practice community policing such as Japan and Tanzania.

2. Data and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This research is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Both primary and secondary data were reviewed. Semi Structured Questionnaires were employed in order to acquire both quantitative and qualitative data. The study area is Kayole , Nairobi county.

Secondary data collection was performed through desktop review of existing literature on community policing in several countries including Japan, Tanzania and Kenya.

A total of 310 questionnaires were administered. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a 50% response rate is considered adequate, 60% is good and above 70% is considered very good. Out of the 310 questionnaires administered, 300 were successful hence 96.8% response rate. This shows the response rate was very good.

3. Results and discussion

The analysis elaborates the most common age group to engage in criminal activities , respondents' awareness level of and involvement in the Nyumba Kumi Initiative and willingness to be engaged in as well as willingness to involve the youth in such community policing initiatives to ensure improved human security.
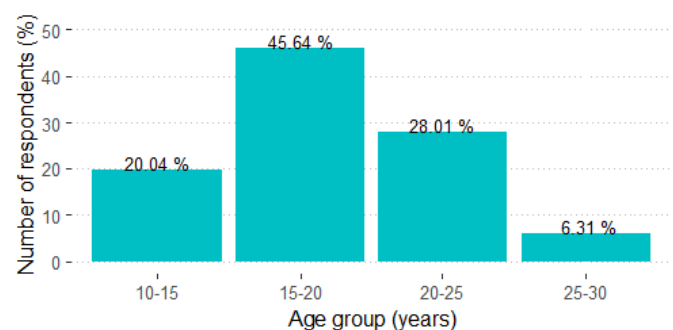

Figure 1: Most Common Age Group to Engage in Criminal Activities

The analysis shows that 45.64% of the respondents believe that the most common age group to engage in criminal activities is 15 – 20 years old, 28.01% of the respondents believe the common age group to be 20 – 25 years old , 20.04% of the respondents believe the common age group to be 10 – 15 years old leaving the least common age group to be 25- 30 years old backed up by 6.31% of the respondents (Figure 1).

This is a clear indication of the prevalence of youth involvement in crime hence efforts to improve human security should involve the youth.
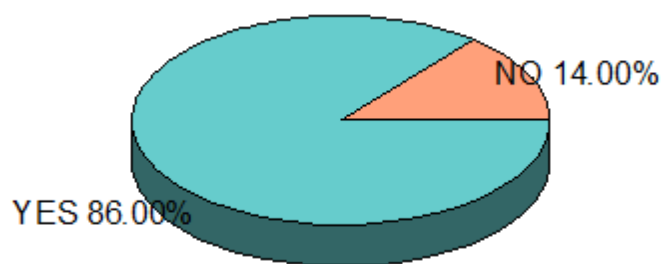

Figure 2: Awareness of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative

The results show that 86% of the respondents are aware of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative but are however reluctant to participate in the same. The lack of trust and confidence in such a community policing initiative is part of the reason why implementation is proving futile. This however can be attributed to the fact that there are no regulations as well as guidelines on the implementation of the Nyumba kumi i.e roles and responsibilities, membership, decision making processes among others. 1.67% of the respondents are not aware of the Nyumba Kumi activities (Figure 2).
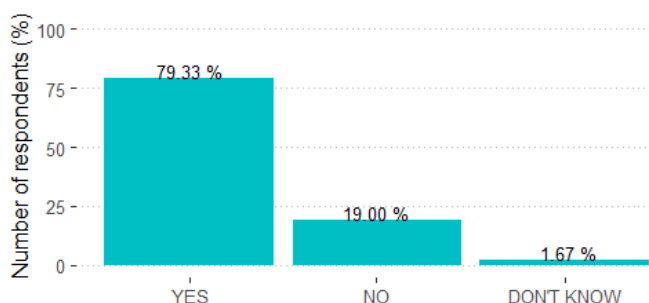

Figure 3: Involvement of Respondents in Nyumba Kumi Initiative

The analysis shows that 79.33 % of the respondents have not been involved in Nyumba Kumi activities, 19% of the respondents have been involved in a number of activities and 1.67% of the respondents are not aware of the Nyumba Kumi activities. (Figure 3). This indicated that majority of residents in Kayole are not effectively involved in Nyumba Kumi activities.
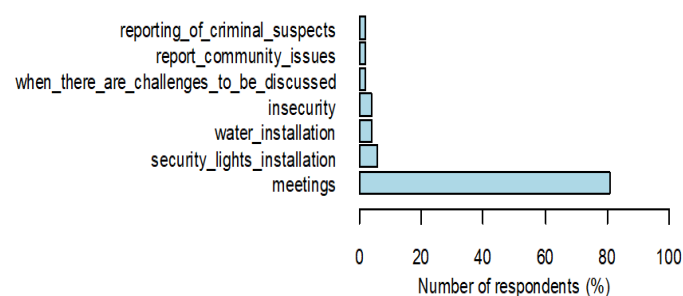

Figure 4: Respondents engagement in Nyumba Kumi Activities

The analysis shows the Nyumba Kumi activities that the respondents have engaged in. The rank shows that 80% of the respondents have attended the Nyumba Kumi meetings (Figure 4). Less than 20 % have been a part of security lights installation, water installation, talks of

insecurity, whenever there are community issues to be discussed, when there is a report of a community issue and reporting of criminal suspects.

Some of the reasons for the minimal involvement in Nyumba Kumi Activities include: Youth not being involved in issues discussed that affect them, Community members not having confidence in their leaders, Elders not knowing their roles and responsibilities, Community members believe that it is a money making scheme, Community members not understanding what Nyumba Kumi entails, Disconnect between the youth and elders , Community members believe that the elders as well as their children engage
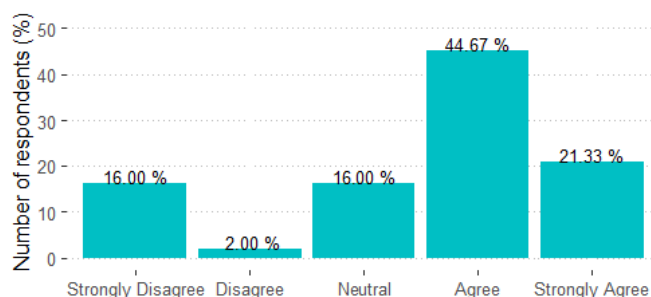
in criminal activities among others.

Figure 5. Respondents Willingness to involve the Youth in Nyumba Kumi

The results show that 44.67% of the respondents agree that the youth should be involved in Nyumba Kumi Initiatives while 21.33% of the respondents strongly agree to the same.16% of the respondents are neutral, 16% of the respondents strongly disagree and 2% of the respondents disagree to the same.Some of the reasons for the majority of the respondents agreeing to youth involvement in Nyumba Kumi include : To keep check of other youth and help curb crime as they all know each other, to mend the relationship between the youth and the elderly as the youth are greatly perceived as criminals, to help restructure the current Nyumba Kumi structure which is not as successful, to serve as a source of employment for the youth, to include youth in decision making processes that affect them, to give youth more roles and responsibility among others.

The lack of youth involvement has led to tension as well as friction with the elders as they are highly viewed as criminals. However the other side of the coin shows that if the youth can keep tabs on each other, and ensure that those engaging in criminal activities are well checked, then this can aid in curbing crime and improving human security. Some of the reasons for the respondents disagreeing on youth involvement include: the youth felt like it's a way of them being handed over to the police, the elders will be reluctant to include the youth due to their vested personal interests, perception that all youths are criminals, some believe that it will increase human insecurity as the youth can cover up for their friends among others.

The analysis shows that 38.26% of the respondents agree that the Nyumba Kumi Initiative can aid in ensuring improved human security, 21.81% of the respondents are neutral, 18.79% of the respondents strongly agree, 12.42% of the respondents strongly disagree and 8.72% of the respondents disagree.
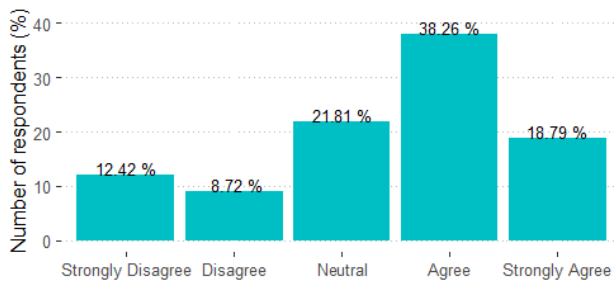
Figure 6: The ability of the Nyumba Kumi Initiative in contributing towards improved Human Security

Majority of the respondents agreed to Nyumba Kumi only if it is restructured as there are a lot of loop holes in the current structure and if the youth are involved in the same. If not then it will be futile. Some of the respondents disagreed because they believe that Nyumba Kumi is a money making business and that the elders / leaders look out for their personal interests rather than the communities 'and that currently it has proven to be futile as the leaders as well as the community members are not aware of their roles and responsibilities and that there is no monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure that Nyumba Kumi Initiatives perform the roles that they should.

3.1 Comparative analysis

CASE STUDY; Neighborhood Watch in Japan

The Neighborhood Association (Tonarigumi) was established by the Japanese government during World War II as the smallest unit of the national mobilization program. It consisted of units of 10 – 15 households organized for internal security as well as civil defense. This system was formalized in 1940. Then participation was mandatory. Each unit has the responsibility to inter alia maintain public security. A network of informants was established in order to link every neighborhood association with the police in order to look out for possible violation of national laws.

After the pacific war, the Tonarigumi was formally abolished in 1947 giving rise to the modern chonaikai or jichikai which are independent voluntary associations with a responsibility to coordinate activities such as neighborhood watch amongst others. These associations help residents to work together for the good of the community. This is through arranging of festivals as well addressing complaints and problems in the community. The members hold meetings and raise administrative costs through membership fees paid. The fees depend on the jichikai committee members who serve for a period of one year. Committee members are delegated different responsibilities. The membership fees go towards installing and maintaining street lights, recreational activities among others. These activities are meant to bring people closer in order to enhance the spirit of togetherness as well as build trust. Despite the fact that membership is voluntary, every household is expected to do so. However there are those who choose not to be a part of it.

Members of the Jichikai include retirees from any field. Kenya has a similar provision for members of the Nyumba Kumi however in this case the retirees refer to those from the police service. This is in a bid to aid in governance as well as empower the community in dealing with security. This can aid in cutting costs of training people as they are already experienced.

There are various similarities between the Nyumba Kumi and the Japan Neighborhood watch. Both initiatives are guided by the principle that security is the responsibility of every member hence it is every person's task to ensure their security as well as those surrounding him.

However, there are differences between the Nyumba Kumi and the Neighbourhood watch in Japan. Most Jichikai organize monthly activities such as cleanup activities and festivals. The associations do not just focus on criminal activities as is the case in Kenya. In Kenya, people are brought together by issues related to security. Aside from that there is minimal or no interaction.

The Nyumba Kumi Initiative is heavily borrowed from the Tanzanian Ujamaa policy which was informed by the African saying 'I am because we are, and because we are so I am '. This led to people developing a natural interest for one another. Both the Ujamaa Policy and Nyumba Kumi initiative give individuals the mandate of ensuring their own safety by knowing their neighbors. Both require individuals to develop a natural interest for one another and share moments together. It can be argued that Tanzania being a socialist society, the people value brotherhood and patriotism as opposed to Kenya being a capitalist whereby people are heavily individualistic. Hence implementation of the Ujamaa policy in Tanzania will not be as difficult as the implementation of Nyumba Kumi in Kenya.

In Tanzania, members of the Nyumba Kumi are vetted however in Kenya, the members are not vetted hence presuming every person to be a member. This brings about loopholes for criminals to take advantage of the community members. One of the major concerns of the respondents being reluctant to being a part of the Nyumba Kumi is the feeling that those in charge are involved in criminal activities, looking out for their personal interests as well as using their leadership position as a money making business i.e. asking the community members for money which is later not accounted for. Accountability will be realized by creating mechanisms which the government policing agencies can be made answerable for addressing the needs and concerns of the communities they serve. The lack of accountability has seen many criminals camouflage as elders and take advantage of community members. There is need to ensure that there is a vetting process for Nyumba Kumi members and that the members are trusted members of the society.

There have been efforts by the County Security Committee in terms of training and releasing around 60 people to the villages to train more people on insecurity i.e handling information on crime and relaying the information to security organs. Members should be well educated and empowered in order to best perform and play a constructive role in their respective jurisdiction. This is through creation of a sense of joint responsibility and joint capacity for addressing security, safety and service delivery amongst the community members and government policing agencies.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mechanisms are key in implementing community policing strategies. Training of members on ADR is important as it gives the members the necessary tools to solve disputes or conflicts in partnership with policing agencies. This will help reduce cases of mob justice depriving citizens of their right to life as well as mishandling of suspected criminals depriving them of the right to security and privacy.

5. Conclusion

With the current wave of insecurity in Kenya, it is imperative for one to know his or her neighbour for the sake of safety. The Nyumba kumi initiative is an interesting strategy as it puts the community in a position whereby they are able to share and report illegal activities without waiting for the national government to act on it. Critics may say that in a society like Kenya, where people value their freedom and privacy, the initiative may prove to be futile. However creation of solutions from the household level will give the communities a sense of ownership hence reduce barriers of implementation. Public acceptance is important for this to work as every person plays an important role.

Inclusivity is also key in ensuring success in implementation of the Nyumba Kumi. Following the current criminal activities such as the Dusit D2 terror attack on January 15, 2019 , talks on the implementation Nyumba Kumi are prevalent. However with no changes on the existing structure, the initiative will not be effective. Issues such as inclusivity of the youth should be taken into consideration as they are greatly affected with regards to engagement in criminal activities. Efforts to improve human security should be geared towards the youth. The ADR mechanisms should be well articulated in order to empower the community members when dealing with disputing parties or suspected criminals.

By involving the youth in the nyumba kumi initiative, cases of youth involvement in crimes could possibly reduce hence improving human security. The youth have great potential and resourcefulness and given an opportunity, they can and have demonstrated capability in ensuring peace and development. It is high time citizens developed their own solutions to deal with their insecurity problems.

"Security is a joint mandate of every person living in Kenya. The first test of security is vigilance."
President Uhuru Kenyatta.

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