

Police - Civilians Relationship and Crime Rate Reduction in Tanga Urban

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Abstract

This article examines the nature of the relationship between the police and civilians in Tanga urban and relates this relationship to the reduction of crimes in the area. The objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the current relationship is regarded by security stakeholders to be positive/good and contributing to crime reduction. This study combines two theories namely; the non-enforcement theory and the theory of change to explain the nature of the relationship. Data was primarily collected from police officers and civilians in Tanga. The findings of the study suggest that, the present relationship does not have enough contribution towards crime rate reduction since the relationship that exists between the two is mostly suspicious. The study concludes and recommends a far stronger cooperation through collective efforts, education, sharing of intelligence information and the designing of new mechanisms that would bring together both the police and civilians in fighting against crimes.

Key Words:

Community policing, corruption, crime rate reduction, police – civilian relations, security

1.0 Introduction

The relationship that exists between the police and civilians under neighbourhood policing, is a strategy and philosophy based on the notion that community - police interaction and mutual support can help control crime and reduce fear of insecurity among community members, (Mwaniki, 2010). The community can help the police for example by helping to identify suspects, helping in arresting law breakers, report security problems to the police or otherwise target the social problems which give rise to a crime in the first place. The relationship among the two parties needs to be positive for these benefits to be realized, (Brogden & Nijhar, 2013).

The police-civilian relationship which is mostly found under community policing has attracted an increasing attention in the last three decades as a strategy to improve public security and safety, (Mwaniki, 2010). The relationship that exists between the police and civilians is an aspect which needs a critical look and understanding because of its potential to contribute to crime reduction. The most common term to describe this relationship is 'Police – Community relations.' In Africa and Tanzania in particular there is a need for studying this relationship since crime is increasing and in some cases there is a Cat and Mouse relationship observable between the police and civilians, (Djurdjevic-lukic, 2014).

According to (Fielding, 2009), police – community relations is “the interactions of police and all community members to reduce crimes and fear that might happen within their surroundings”. Generally, it is a relationship that encourages the public to give a helping hand to their police in searching for security and peace. It challenges the notion that, the fight against crimes and maintenance of order is the duty of the police force alone; and it extends such a task to citizens who are primarily the main agents for peace. For this reason, the relationship between the police and the citizens must aim at generating cooperation, freedom and a willingness from each side to see the other as a partner sharing the common goal of building one society which will be crime free, (Chinwokwu, 2017).

2.0 The Global Context

Worldwide, the emphasis on a good relationship between the police and the people they protect demands that policies guiding community policing should be established to ensure that crimes are reduced and order maintained, (Andrew & Issa, 2025). In high population countries like the United States of America, (with over 300 million people and high rates of crime) need is always seen of public awareness in the communities on how to help the police reduce crime. Assessments on how communities interact with the local police have been conducted so far to assess whether positive relationship has been maintained, (Davis, 2012). The same thing is happening in Europe and particularly in the United Kingdom where it is commonly referred to as neighbourhood watch. This practice of neighbourhood watch started in 1983 following the need to involve the community in what was previously seen as police work, (Fielding, 2009). Under neighbourhood watch the emphasis is put on how the police can help local residents conduct patrol and other security activities within their areas. In this arrangement, people form small groups which patrol their residences and help the police, (*ibid*).

Another example of community policing can be found in Australia. The Australian government issued a report on how community policing functions and compared it to the Asian perspective where the police interact with civilians in their daily patrol to fight crime. This proves that police civilian relations policies have been working throughout the world and facilitate civilian networks in interacting with the police, (Centre, 2014). In Australia, the police forces have been cooperating with the community to uncover cases which might have proved difficult for the police force alone. The same happened in Tokyo, Japan as (Rake, 1987) discovered. When the Japanese police decided to involve civilians in the fight against crime in the City of Tokyo, the crime rate decreased by a half over a period of three decades. The study by Rake has demonstrated the contribution of citizens in the whole process of ensuring that people are living in harmony and tranquillity, (Leishman, 2007).

3.0 The African Context

Insecurity in Africa has been growing and Africa is viewed as a continent with all kinds of conflicts and war, (Spearin, 2014). In Darfur, Sudan, people are also helping the police force together with other security companies to uncover attacks which are arranged by criminal groups. With such attitude, civilians are showing that they prefer peace to violence and a positive relation to a negative one. Studies conducted in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia have shown that the relationship between the police and civilians needs to be reviewed critically across the African continent, (Mwaniki, 2010),

(Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009) and (Wong, 2009). Their studies which were conducted through research, questionnaire and observation have mentioned improper police actions, corruption, poor awareness of the laws and leakages of intelligence information as factors influencing the relationship. For instance (Kaburu, 2020) observed that in Kenya, his own country, the relationship between the police and civilians is in danger since there is a perception among many Kenyans that their police force is corrupt and cooperates with criminals and causes street insecurity. With such perception people will never feel safe to share information on criminals believing that criminals are backed up by the police force, (*ibid*).

In the 1980s, Tanzania implemented the strategy which was then known as Sungusungu which could be equated with neighbourhood watch. This strategy involved the establishment of voluntary groups for local security provision, (Andrew & Issa, 2025). The relationship between the police and civilians can be seen clearly under the community policing policy which was officially introduced in Tanzania in 2006 under the then Inspector General of Police, Said Mwema. IGP Mwema saw the need for strengthening the relationship between the police and the people they protect as a means of reducing crime in the country, (Cross Charlotte, 2013). Since that time the policy has been implemented across Tanzania starting from Dar es Salaam and moving to other regions. In Tanga region the policy has been practised since 2006. Natives have been participating with the police in the implementation of community policing which, among many objectives, builds the cooperation between civilians and their police force.

4.0 Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical foundations of the policy are also well established in literature. Under this, (Rake, 1987) emerged with two theories, one of non-enforcement and the other of interaction. The two are focusing on the same idea that the police force should no longer be the agent for enforcing law but that they should intensify their interactions with the people they protect. He cited the City of Tokyo as a place where such theories have managed to strengthen the relationship between the community and police, and also to halve the crime rate after a few years.

Basically, what Rake proposed was that the police force should drop their superiority complex in relation to the people they protect to enable community members to feel a sense of responsibility in collaborating with their police in the fight against crime. These theories suggest more ways in which people can cooperate with the police, who are now interacting with them in their lives and are no longer forcing them to obey, but are coming with different mechanisms to persuade people to comply with the law without the feeling of compulsion.

Again, (Djurdjevic-lukic, 2014) explained the foundation of the theory of change which focuses on the interaction between the police and communities and considers community policing as a potentially important tool through which to improve police-community relations, to develop a model of interaction between the state and traditional leaders, to strengthen accountability of the police to the citizens, and generally to improve the safety and security environment. Her theory proposes that the establishment of state-community security models at the grassroots level is an important aspect in ensuring that citizens are included in security process and cooperate with the police force. It calls

upon all stake holders of security and acknowledges the role of families and minority groups in participating in the issue of security giving them a sense of responsibility for their own security.

5.0 Methodology

This study employed a case study design since Tanga has experienced some security threats in the recent years as mentioned by the police report of 2022. Tanga is a region bordering Kenya hence some crimes that affect Kenya, if not well managed, can spread into the neighbouring Tanzania and mostly through Tanga. It is primarily a qualitative study which included the collection of data through interviews and questionnaires from the sample selected which included police and civilians in Tanga urban. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data derived from the open-ended interview questions or information in the form of statements in the open-ended questions of the questionnaires. Quantitative analysis was used to analyse structured questions through the use of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) where simple descriptive statistics involving analysis of frequencies was performed to analyse the responses from the respondents.

6.0 Study Findings and Discussion

6.1 Nature of relationship and crime rate reduction

The study was interested in examining the nature of the relationship that exists between the police and civilians in crimes rate reduction. The aim of the study was to identify whether the relationship that exists between the police and civilians is positive or negative. Respondents were asked to grade the relationship as to whether it was very good, average, poor or very poor. In their responses the majority of police officers (53%) said that the relationship is poor, whereas 27% of police responded that the relationship is very poor. Only 4 policemen, (13%) said it was average and the rest (7%) commented that their relationship with the civilians is very good and that they help one another in reducing crime within the city of Tanga. Out of the 30 civilian respondents, majority (63%) said that the relationship is poor, while 5 of them (17%) said that it is very poor and 5 (representing 17%) said the relationship is moderate. Only a single civilian commented that the relationship was very good, (3% of the total). The general results from both the police and civilians reveal that the majority of respondents have identified with the negative relationship that exists between the police and civilians within Tanga urban.

In regard to the issue of identifying the relationship that exist between the police and civilians, this study came out with three types of relationships; the positive relationship, the negative relationship and the fifty-fifty relationship. 65% of the respondents who constituted the majority of the respondents said that the relationship that exists in Tanga Urban between the police and civilians is negative. This group was made up of junior police officers who claimed the existence of a gap between them and their commanders. The majority of civilians also commented on the negativity of existing relationship. Respondents mentioned a number of contributory factors.

Corruption and unequal treatment were cited by almost all contributors to the research. As argued by (Parker, 1956) and (Gaffigan, 2018) and repeated by (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009) and (Becker et al, 1974) corruption seems to be the source of the poor

relationship and has contributed to issues of mistrust and the oppression of minority groups. The police officers are seen as a corrupt force which favours the upper classes and obstructs the lower classes that make up the majority of inhabitants of Tanga urban. The motorbike taxi (Bodaboda) operators who were the majority among civilian respondents, lamented that their relationship with the police is deteriorating every day, for the police have in their minds that this group is always associated with criminals or is a part of the criminal fraternity. Since the police officers are at the same time the vehicle inspectors, it is hard for the Bodaboda operators to cooperate with the police for fear of being caught for traffic offences, or of being accused of breach of road regulations. There is a general perception among civilians about the police officers which may hinder the relationship between the two. As explained above, civilians claim the police make excessive use of their power while the police claim that civilians are cooperating with criminals to ambush police posts, wound or kill police officers and steal arms, (Andrew & Issa, 2025; Kaburu, 2020). All of this contributes to the negative relationship which does not help in reducing crimes in Tanga, but rather escalate the issues of insecurity and deteriorating the relationship.

About 25% of respondents who were interviewed identified a positive relationship between the police officers and the civilians they protect in Tanga urban. Most of these respondents were senior police officers and religious leaders. Drawing on some issues where the police and civilians cooperate, the respondents identified a positive relation which least contributes to crime rate reduction. One respondent, for example, alleged that, one police officer responsible for criminal investigation was aware of a number of occasions when information shared by civilians with the police later resulted in the arrest of the law breakers. This respondent went further by pointing out that information from civilians had resulted in the arrest of terrorist suspects. He therefore denied that there is a negative relationship. The police force in Tanga has launched the Regional Police Commander (RPC Cup) which brings together the police in their units and civilians in their local team to compete in football matches in which the winner is presented with the cup by the Regional Police Commander. This competition is played annually and the aim of the founder, who was the then Regional Police Commander, Deputy Commissioner of Police Kashai, was to reduce fear of the people vis à vis the police and to find ways in which the two could interact in a social activity before they interact in important official issues.

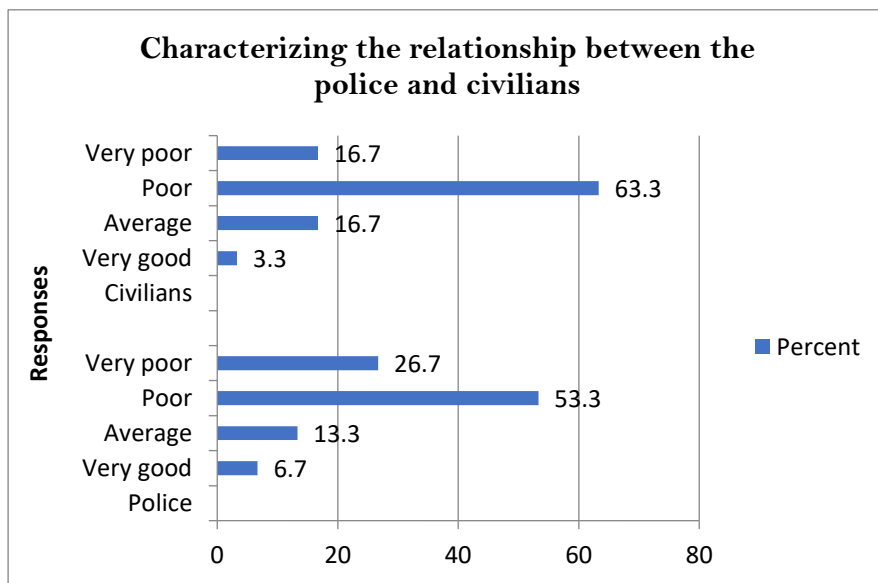
The police force in Tanga agreed to have their representatives in all wards of Tanga urban as a response to the policy named “polisi kata”, which demands the participation of police officers at the grass root level. The police assigned there are responsible for dealing with community activities including funerals and other events. The aim is to create closer relations with civilians so that they can view their police force as an agent for peace and as fellow citizens. The other role of the officers in wards is to train all security groups who are locally tasked to perform a ‘neighbourhood watch’. During the defence and security meetings conducted at ward level, the police officer is attending secretary of the meeting, but also responds to all matters related to the people’s safety within the particular ward.

The remaining 5% of the respondents gave a fifty-fifty answer on the existing relationship. The study found that not all the respondents had either a negative or a

positive attitude towards the existing relationship. There was this smaller group who did not accept that everything was either positive or negative. Their ideas were that there are some cases in which the police have messed things up and some where the fault lay with the civilians. One respondent who was asked to describe the existing relationship replied as follows:

‘The relationship between the police and civilians here in Tanga is undefined; it depends on the mood of the police officer to help you. If his mood that day is clear then you are lucky, you will see the best of him and if his mood is down...my friend you are finished’. (An interview with a shopkeeper at Jengo Jipya, Chumbageni, Tanga, 18th September 2023).

The figure below presents the respondents stance on the relationship between the police and civilians in Tanga urban in relation to crime rate reduction.



Source: Field Data, 2023

On the extent to which the relationship contributes to crime rate reduction, a large majority of the respondents (70%) from both interviews and questionnaires said that the present relationship between the police force and civilians had no positive impact on crime rate reduction in Tanga Urban. The question on how the policy of community policing could strengthen the relationship and help reduce crime could not be taken further because a number of issues emerged which indicated that not all members of the community had an idea of what is meant by “community policing”, or what is the real aim of community policing towards strengthening the relationship. One police officer interviewed on how community policing can pull together the police and civilians responded as follows:

‘This is the new policy which I don’t find suitable. For many of us the policy found us out of CCP so if they want it to function the way they want it is better that they start teaching it to the new recruits at CCP...’ (Interview with R. A. Police Staff Sergeant, Polisi Jamii (Community Police) Department, Tanga. 18th July, 2023).

In Tanga urban, the police are still seen by the majority of civilians as not cooperating with people, hence the people are not ready to share with them any information which may contribute to crime rate reduction. The issue of linkage of intelligence information which the people who share it with the police force has become a matter of great concern and destroys the relationship. Police are seen to have relations with criminals and so they lose the trust of the other law-abiding citizens. As explained before (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009) found out that there is a strong perception among Kenyans that Police are collaborating with criminals. They pointed out the reasons for this being little pay and underfunding of their activities. The victimization survey in Nairobi found that, 66% of respondents had been victims of crime, while 86% had witnessed crimes in the city and had observed a poor police response to such incidents. In Tanga urban, the research findings show that 83% of the respondents claim that the relationship between the police and civilians will improve only when there is a deal to be made from which both will benefit. The relationship which was intended by the community policing policy to bring together the police and civilians in the fighting against crimes has not been achieved and crimes are escalating day and night.

One civilian, who was a shopkeeper, narrated an incident that he one day reported to the police station. There was a gang around his area dealing in drugs. He considered himself to be a positive informer of the police with the aim of putting such activity to an end, but things turned out against him. One day a police officer approached his shop and secretly planted a bullet in a sack of beans and arrested him for dealing with law breakers by selling bullets. ¹He was detained for some time and later released after the police failed to find evidence. The action not only proved that the police were hiding the criminals but also showed how the law enforcing agents can negatively reward an informer whose aim was to cooperate with them in reducing crimes within the society.

However, a senior police officer Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) ²refused the claim that the police are revealing the names of informers to criminals, though he accepted that some police officers are cooperating with criminals for reasons which he typically called “classified”. This officer tried to elaborate on the types of informers whom his office was dealing with. The first group of informers were the revenge informers who cooperate with police force after their business partners had decided to cooperate with them. For the police these are the positive informers and their aim is to see that both lose. The second are the double dealer informers. This group has relationships with both the police and the criminals. The aim of such informers is to benefit from both sides. For the police force there is a fifty-fifty chance that such are sharing valid information with them. The ASP continued by saying that the third category of informers is the cash informers whose aim is to generate money from the information they share but not to reduce crime. Such groups can sometimes bring false information to the police which will mislead the entire team and portray a negative image of the police to the public. The last informers are the boost informers. These informers are boosting up issues in such a way that a minor case will be seen as huge as a threat to the security of the society. They are also

¹ An interview with a shopkeeper at Jengo Jipya, Chumbageni, Tanga, 18th September 2023

² Assistant Superintendent of Police interviewed on 17th September 2023 at Chumbageni Central Police, Tanga.

the spoilers of the truth and always act in such a way that they appear to be helping the security agents by revealing criminal information while not actually doing so.

The study also discovered that the type of relationship advocated by the community policing policy is only favoured / supported by high-ranking officers rather than the junior police officers who are directly intended to interact with the people. Out of 20 police officers interviewed, 16 (80%) agreed that the junior police officers are not happy with the policy as it gives too much power to the citizens rather than to them. They are the ones in front line dealing with the people, but find that civilians are not respecting them as much as they did before. There is no longer the necessary fear factor in the relationship. Issues of people's awareness of law, formation of security groups among community members and the people's access to the phone numbers of senior police officers have threatened the relationship between the police and civilians. The senior officers agreed that the closeness of the police to the people and awareness of the law among the people will strongly contribute to crime rate reduction. Civilians will now know their rights and will not fear police officers if they share information and refuse to hide criminals.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship that exists between the police and civilians and identified three kinds of relationships. The first kind of relationship is the negative one, in which the police and civilians have no common ground for working together or assisting one another in fighting crime. The second relationship identified by the study was the fifty-fifty relationship which is rarely found. Finally, there is the positive relationship in which the police and civilians work together as a team to fight against crimes. Secondly, on examining the extent to which the relationship contributes to crime rate reduction the study found that about 70% of the respondents to the questionnaires said that the current relationship between the police and civilians in Tanga urban does not facilitate the reduction of crimes. This suggests that the policy of community policing which insists on strengthening the relationship and the creation of a collective work environment between the police and civilians has not been well implemented; and it seems likely that crime rates will continue to rise.

Lastly, in identifying the ways in which police and civilians can cooperate in reducing crimes within the society the study observed that, a majority of those questioned wanted the people to cooperate with police officers in fighting against criminality in the communities. They also recommended more education to both the police officers and the public on the merits of community policing and the whole process of working together as a team in crime rate reduction.

7.2 Recommendations

Firstly, the police should not be just an enforcement agent as it is now but should be more interactive as (Rake, 1987) suggested in the case of Tokyo's experience. The police force in Tanga should also adopt this behaviour and change their strategies; for example, by avoiding the use of unnecessary force, by stopping harassing the people, and by stopping bearing false witness against the people whom they think are not collaborating. This will bring trust, respect and a sense of ownership of the force by the people of the

community. More intensive interaction is needed such as peoples' participation in the committee of the police force making decisions on matters related to people's security to make sure that each side is well served.

Secondly, the establishing of a state-community security relationship at grass roots level should have a much higher priority than it appears to have at the moment. The police force in Tanga, through the application of Polisi Kata programme, should now see how the new mechanisms will equip the police officers to cooperate and participate fully in matters related to their respective wards to which they have been sent. Hardship allowances will be of great help to officers sent to rural wards to avoid the issue of officers spending most of their time in Tanga town rather than in their working areas. This idea was introduced by (Djurdjevic-lukic, 2014) who insisted on ensuring that citizens are included in security and cooperate with the police force. He called upon all stake holders to security, including families and minority groups to participating in the issues of security thus giving them a sense of responsibility for their own security.

Thirdly, civilians have to change their attitudes towards police officers by starting to help them fight against crimes and criminals. Given that defence and security are the concern of everyone, it is therefore the duty of every person, by the virtue of the authority vested upon them by the constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania as citizens, to defend the nation against all enemies being from within or from without the boundaries of the country. People should not leave everything to the police for crimes which start from small beginnings might eventually affect the whole community. Giving a positive hand to the police will strengthen the relationship and will surely reduce crimes and make Tanga Urban a better place for all.

Fourthly, police officers should review their behaviour and actions towards the people they are supposed to protect. Information provided by civilian informers which results in the arrest of criminals should be handled with care. Police should acknowledge the role played by the people in helping them in their daily activities. This acknowledgement includes rewarding the informers to motivate them; but also keeping them safe to avoid them being linked to intelligence information they provided. The traffic officers who were criticised by most of the Bodaboda operators should also change their behaviour by taking this group as an important partner in the fight against crime. This would be useful since these men are hired by many people in different walks of life, some of whom might well be criminals. Using them positively by respecting their ideas and avoiding humiliating them will help to strengthen the relationship and the fight against crimes will prevail.

Lastly, the authority concerned should find as many ways as possible of drawing together police officers and civilians to discuss matters of security. The authorities should establish street patrols to ask the people about the general behaviour of their police officers, since there are some police whom people claim humiliate them. It then becomes a generalisation that the police force in Tanga is humiliating the public. This constant feedback from the civilians will improve the relationship between the police and the civilians and eventually contribute to reducing the rate of crimes.

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