

Securing Communities to Bring Sustainable Development, Building Peace and Community Safety: the Ethiopian Community Policing in Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia

Authors : Demelash Kassaye

Abstract : The Ethiopia case study reveals a unique model of community policing that has developed from a particular political context in which there is a history of violent political transition, a political structure characterized by ethnic federalism and a political ideology that straddles liberal capitalism and democracy on the one hand, and state-led development and centralized control on the other. The police see community policing as a way to reduce crime. Communities speak about community policing as an opportunity to take on policing responsibilities themselves. Both of these objectives are brought together in an overarching rhetoric of community policing as a way of 'mobilizing for development' - whereby the community cooperate with the police to reduce crime, which otherwise inhibits development progress. Community policing in Amhara has primarily involved the placement of Community Police Officers at the kebele level across the State. In addition, a number of structures have also been established in the community, including Advisory Councils, Conflict Resolving Committees, family police and the use of shoe shiner's and other trade associations as police informants. In addition to these newly created structures, community policing also draws upon pre-existing customary actors, such as militia and elders. Conflict Resolving Committees, Community Police Officers and elders were reported as the most common first ports of call when community members experience a crime. The analysis highlights that the model of community policing in Amhara increased communities' access to policing services, although this is not always attended by increased access to justice. Community members also indicate that public perceptions of the police have improved since the introduction of community policing, in part due to individual Community Police Officers who have, with limited resources, innovated some impressive strategies to improve safety in their neighborhoods. However, more broadly, community policing has provided the state with more effective surveillance of the population - a potentially oppressive function in the current political context. Ultimately, community policing in Amhara is anything but straightforward. It has been a process of attempting to demonstrate the benefits of newfound (and controversial) 'democracy' following years of dictatorship, drawing on generations of customary dispute resolution, providing both improved access to security for communities and an enhanced surveillance capacity for the state. For external actors looking to engage in community policing, this case study reveals the importance of close analysis in assessing potential merits, risks and entry points of programming. Factors found to be central in shaping the nature of community policing in the Amhara case include the structure of the political system, state-society relations, cultures dispute resolution and political ideology.

Keywords : community policing, community, militias, ethiopia

Conference Title : ICPLCCJ 2023 : International Conference on Penal Law, Crime and Criminal Justice

Conference Location : San Francisco, United States

Conference Dates : November 06-07, 2023