

October 2016

www.fmreview.org/community-protection

Community policing in Kakuma camp, Kenya

Hanno Brankamp

Community policing has become a popular way of promoting local ownership of security in refugee camps in Kenya and more widely, but it can also fall victim to its ambivalent position at the intersection of refugee communities and state policing.

Making refugee camps 'safe' for their residents is the responsibility of police, military or other national security forces in host countries. Aid agencies and governments alike acknowledge that the (physical) protection of camp refugees is meaningless without refugees' own active participation. As a consequence, a number of camps are now policed jointly by national police and refugee auxiliary forces that operate under special agreements and a Community Policing framework.

As a governance strategy, community policing aims to create a direct link between local communities and official government forces in an attempt to curb violence and crime, and build a sustainable relationship of trust with the population. In many African societies, community police have even become the predominant providers of everyday security services in the face of corruption, distrust of the police, or weak performance of official authorities. Local policing initiatives emerge as ready alternatives to deliver justice and security by making use of local knowledge, customary practices and/or traditional leadership networks.

In refugee camps, with diverse multi-faith and multi-ethnic populations, policymakers are now seeking to embed security operations in local structures. Today, community policing in refugee camps exists across a variety of geographical locations, social environments and cultures, and their responsibilities are expanding. These responsibilities encompass information exchange, mediation between parties to a conflict, crowd control and showing a physical presence in the camp through daily foot patrols and security sweeps thereby demonstrating 'refugee ownership' of security operations on the ground.

In Nyarugusu refugee camp in western Tanzania, refugee guards – known as *Sungusungu* – are armed with light weapons, such as sticks and clubs, and have been involved in tackling crime and public order disturbances since the early 2000s. They answer directly to the camp commandant, a Tanzanian government official who oversees all camp operations.

In Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya, NGOs and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, routinely face resistance from refugee communities that are understandably sceptical of outside interference. A rudimentary community policing scheme in Dadaab, first introduced in 2007, has since evolved into Community Peace and Protection Teams (CPPTs) under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). However, severe mobility restrictions in and around Dadaab and the strength of clan-based forms of organisation have strongly influenced CPPTs' behaviour within the communities and across the camps.

Security in Kakuma

The case of Kakuma refugee camp illustrates some of the more ambivalent and conflicting aspects of community-based policing in humanitarian contexts. Kakuma lies in Kenya's remote north-western Turkana County and comprises a patchwork of 18 national and numerous ethnic refugee communities who have escaped various conflicts in the region over the past 24 years. In May 2016, Kakuma was home to over 192,000 refugees, the majority coming from South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Ethiopia. This heterogeneity and the wide geographical expanse of the camp make policing a challenging task.

Kenya's government security agencies hold responsibility for law enforcement but also operate alongside commercial security companies hired to secure the humanitarian compounds. Security reports reveal a wide range of crimes occurring in the camp – sexual violence and rape, domestic violence, banditry, theft, inter-communal clashes, organised crime, drug abuse, boot-legging, traffic violations and disturbance of public order – but many refugees see Kenya's police itself as a source of insecurity, corruption and extortion.

Community policing in refugee camps seeks to mitigate these

concerns by actively engaging local communities where outside intervention is unwanted or feared. In Kakuma, as in Dadaab, LWF manages the CPPTs, a refugee force that cooperates with the Kenyan police in patrolling, crime investigation and crowd control. The current programme has its origins in an earlier security initiative – 'refugee guards' – and now exists alongside various other community-specific customary justice mechanisms. CPPTs in

Kakuma have since become an ever-growing force of 330 refugee security officers (55 women and 275 men) and 27 Kenyan nationals in supervisory roles.

Over recent years, LWF has made efforts to discourage sectarianism and ethnic affiliations within its community policing forces but with only limited success. Kakuma is visibly divided between a large number of different refugee communities, and of course CPPTs are recruited from these very communities. Despite using an aspirational language that dissociates policing work from ethnicity and clan, the CPPTs are very much rooted in their respective ethnic communities and clans. Some community administration buildings even serve as operational bases for CPPTs' patrols, interrogations, or mediation between conflict parties.

To refugees in need of assistance and physical protection, CPPTs may seem more accessible and less intimidating than the Kenyan police, and every block has at least two assigned refugee officers on duty, day and night. In theory, CPPTs are responsible for information gathering in police inquiries because of their language skills and knowledge of local communities. In emergencies, refugees contact these local staff who assess the situation and then request police reinforcements or an ambulance, if required. A Somali CPPT recruit was adamant that all security operations in

Kakuma crucially depend on the community police: "The police cannot just come here and know right away what is going on. They depend on us [CPPTs] to tell them what is happening and what should be done about it".¹ And indeed, it is not without reason that the CPPTs are habitually referred to as the 'eyes and ears' of the police and UNHCR.

However, this close association has also created a new set of problems; some residents perceive CPPTs as spies and collaborators in a camp system of surveillance

and control and as agents of corruption, not protection. Ironically, CPPTs are at the same time exposed to police violence, especially when appearing to interfere with or encroaching upon police responsibilities. Community policing in Kakuma is therefore contingent not only on the legitimacy of CPPTs in resolving disputes and cultivating trustful relations with refugee communities but also on their actual and perceived liaison with national police forces.

Hanno Brankamp

hanno.brankamp@sant.ox.ac.uk

DPhil candidate, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford

www.geog.ox.ac.uk

1. Interview, Kakuma II, March 2015.



CPPTs on patrol in Kakuma refugee camp.

Hanno Brankamp