PERCEPTION OF THE POLICE AND THE YOUTH IN ENHANCING COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATION IN KILIFI COUNTY, COASTAL KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Insecurity is a serious problem in the coastal region of Kenya. The problem has affected to a large extent the socioeconomic aspects of the six counties namely Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Lamu, Tana River and Taita Taveta. Important to note is that the region’s main economic stay is tourism. Apparently, tourism flourishes in secure environments. Accordingly, the prevailing insecurity situation in Kilifi County among other counties in the region, has destroyed the tourism sector. Insecurity challenges in the county range from traditional petty crimes, Gender Based Violence, violence caused by a strong belief in witchcraft pitying the elderly, the upsurge of criminal gangs, radicalization and Violent Extremism (VE). However, security is a broad based concept that requires a multi-stakeholder approach in its mitigation. It is in this realization that a study was mooted to investigate the perceptions of the police and the youth in enhancing community-police relations in Kilifi County with a view of restoring security for socioeconomic development. To achieve this objective, the study adopted survey research design. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the youth in Kilifi County based on expert knowledge on the insecurity dynamics in the area. The study selected 120 at-risk youth using clustering approach and 30 youths were recruited for the study in a disproportionate way in each of the clusters of Malindi (30), Magarini (30) and Kilifi North (30). The study included an additional 30 youths from Kilifi South as a control group. In addition, purposive and convenient sampling techniques were also employed to select frontline security officers to form three Focus Group Discussions, one in each of the aforementioned sites. Further, three (3) Key Informants Interviews (KII) with senior National Government security representatives were conducted to supplement primary data collected by way of interviews. The collected data was analyzed appropriately, with quantitative data handled by the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data was analyzed by classifying information into thematic areas based on the study objective.

Key words: Insecurity, security, Kilifi County, Coast of Kenya, Youth, Police, community-police relations, Radicalization, Criminal Gangs, Violent Extremism.
Introduction

There is a growing interest and attention on the place of youth in criminal gang membership, radicalization and recruitment into Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) in Kenya, especially in the coastal hotspots (KCCVEAP 2017, KCCVEAP 2017, LCCVEAP 2017, MCCVEAP, 2017). Kenya like any other country in the world has had its share of insecurity challenges within and without its borders (Botha 2013, Shauri & Obeka 2017). Within the country, apart from the traditional crimes, there has been growing awareness on historical injustices, marginalization, exclusion and social injustices, unemployment that have led to the emergency of Violent Extremism (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2014, Kempe 2012).

While research has been conducted on the general phenomenon, especially on the push and pull factors (Shauri, 2018), previous pieces of research have targeted Al-shabaab returnees (Botha 2013), women victims (Ibid), the irredentist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), while little effort has been directed to the perception of the police and the youth in enhancing community-police relations with a view of promoting security in the country, especially in Kilifi County, where the study was based. Accordingly, there is a gap in literature in understanding the perception of the police and the youth with regard to the state of relation between the community and the police in the county. In this regard, this article is based on research conducted in one of the six counties, Kilifi County, in the Coastal Region of Kenya.

The study was in realization of the shift from using the country’s security machinery to deal with crime, radicalization and Violent Extremism (VE) to try and understand public perception, that of the police and the youth, on the status of relationship between the community and the police. This observation justified the need for the survey, in addition to the realization that criminal gangs and VEOs affect the different sectors of the society requiring an understanding with a view of designing mitigation measures to deal with insecurity (National Strategy for CVE, 2017). There are different interventions to mitigate insecurity such as awareness, education, disengagement, assessment, rehabilitation and reintegration (Ibid), which means that various stakeholders have a role to play. Accordingly, understanding the police and youth perception with regard to the state of community-police relation is a contribution towards restoring security in the area.

However, for the stakeholders to effectively engage in various strategies of mitigation, there is need for an understanding of the problem, its causes, extent and possible mechanisms of resolution through scientific approaches. There was therefore need to document the perceptions of the youth and the police in understanding the relationship between the community and the police in Kilifi County. The goal was to use the findings to recommend and create an ambient environment that mitigates insecurity brought about by youth recruitment into criminal gangs and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) in a view to foster security in the county for socio-economic development.
The Context of the Problem

Kenya has in the recent past experienced an upsurge in incidences of criminal and VE activities within its borders (Shauri and Obeka, 2017, Shauri, 2018). The response to this situation has often been associated with strife between the security forces and the perpetrators of crime and VE. Research demonstrates that push and pull factors (Botha 2013, Ranstorp, 2016) have aggravated the strained relationship between the community, especially the youth and the police, threatening the relation thereof (Jacobsen 2017). Moreover, limited effort has been directed towards understanding the perception of the police and the youth with regard to the status of relationship between the community and the police, especially in Kilifi County in the coastal region of Kenya. Accordingly, the why and how of youth and police perceptions with regard to the aforementioned relation remains unclear.

Accordingly, there exist a gap in understanding the relationship between the community and the police, especially the perceptions of the police and the youth in Kilifi County. More precisely, there has been incidences of alleged disappearances and extrajudicial killings, increasing number of criminal gangs, recruitment into criminal gangs and violent activities with a special focus on the youth in coastal Kenya. The coastal region has been synonymous with such incidences and as such, several criminal gangs have been formed across the region with clear identities such as Wakali Wao, Wakali Kwanza, Wajukuu WaBibi, Wajukuu Wamutume, Nguruwe Boys, Kapenguria Six among others and violent conflict hotspots (See County CVE Action Plans) have been identified in the region. The study therefore aimed at establishing the perceptions of the youth and the police with regard to the relationship between the community and the police in the area with a view of enhancing security for socioeconomic development. More specifically, the survey aimed at providing information against which to assess the strength of the relationship between the community and the police in keeping peace and security in the study area.

However, in the context of this study, youth is considered a category of people between 18-35 years (Constitution 2010). As such, the median age of Kenyan youth is estimated to be 19 years, making the population youthful (Kenya Youth Survey Report 2016). According to the Kenya Population and Housing Census (2009), the total country’s population is 38,610,097 million people. Of these, 19,192,458 are males, while 19,417,639 are females. The youth in Kenya (18-35 years) account for 30% of the total population, with 48.3% and 51.7% being male and female respectively. Of the population, 12,824,624 are economically inactive, 44% males and 56% females respectively (KNBS, 2010).

Kilifi County population was estimated to be 1,217,892 in 2012 as projected in the Kenya Population and Housing Census (2009), which is composed of 587,719 males and 630,172 females. The Kilifi County population was projected to rise to 1,336,590 and 1,466,856 in 2015 and 2017 respectively at growth rate of 3.1 percent per annum (KPHC 2009). Males represent 47.5%, while females represent 52.5% of the total population, indicating a male: female ratio of 1:1.07. (KCADP, 2017). Given the high (30%) percentage of youth in the population, it is imperative therefore to understand their perception with regard to the state of the community-police relation in the area and corroborate their views with those of the
security agencies. In fact, with 58.7% of the youth living in the rural areas (KNBS, 2010), a characteristic of large part of Kilifi County, the study is important in ensuring the perception of the youth with regard to the state of the relation is understood for a secure environment to be created in the efforts to foster socio-economic development in the county.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study was guided by the following objectives, to:

1. Assess youth awareness/knowledge on the insecurity situation in Kilifi County of the Coastal Region of Kenya
2. Explore the perceptions of the youth in Kilifi on the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community.
3. Assess the perceptions of frontline police officers on their role in promoting good relation with the community in Kilifi County.

**Methodology of the Study**

Security studies are sensitive topics and in most cases treated as special research projects. Owing to the special nature of the research, the approach to study such issues requires skills, tact and experience. Accordingly, a mixed methods approach was used that included

1. Interviews with 120 youth (30 in Malindi, 30 in Magarini, 30 in Kilifi North and 30 others in Kilifi South Sub County – acting as a control group).
2. Three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with nine (9) frontline security officers identified in the three sub counties (1 in Malindi, 1 in Kilifi North and 1 in Magarini) were conducted.
3. Three (3) Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) with senior security administrators with the National Government were done to complement primary data collected by way of interview schedules.

Diverse sampling strategies were adopted to select the site and participants of the study. First, Kilifi County was selected purposively based on expert judgment of the researcher with regard to insecurity and knowledge of youth and policing issues in the area. Second, 120 youth were selected using non-random disproportionate stratified sampling, while participants for the KIIs and FGDs were purposively and conveniently sampled from the study population respectively.
Findings of the Study
Results of the study are presented, interpreted and discussed based on the objectives of the study and thematically categorized to ensure flow of information. In this regard, the section begins with a presentation and discussion of information on the background of the participants of the study before venturing into issues of the perception of the police and the youth in promoting good relation with the community in the area. The idea of presenting background information is to characterize the participants of the study for easy understanding of the patterns and trends of responses with regard to the study variables.

Demographic Information
This section presents demographic characteristics of the 120 at-risk youth. Demographics are critical in understanding the patterns, trends and composition of the primary sample of the study. Where sampling was representative, such as in this study, demographics can approximate the characteristics of the population from which the sample was extracted. There are several demographic characteristics that were considered and are presented next.

1). Gender of the Participants
Gender is an important aspect of the society because it offers the foundation of understanding the relations amongst its members. More significantly, gender is understood to represent the maleness or femaleness of an individual and sociologically the roles each is expected to play. This variable was considered imperative for the study because it would form the basis of explaining the variation in the distribution and patterns of recruitment of the youth into criminal and VE groups in the area. Importantly, gender consideration in unpacking the vulnerability to recruitment of the youth into criminal and VE groups is critical because of the differential experiences and perceptions between genders with regard to crime and insecurity. Figure 1 carries the findings of the study.

![Gender of Participants](image)

**Figure 1: Gender of Participants**

It emerges in Figure 1 that over three fifths (63%) of the study participants were male, while over one third (37%) were female youth. The differential gender, with higher (63%) proportion of males than female (37%) is a mirror of the situation on the ground where more males participate in community activities than females. This situation obtains and is borne out by the patriarchy nature of the Kenyan society. Imperatively, the gender variations ensures
inclusivity of the experiences and perceptions of the youth on the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community in Kilifi County.

2). Age of the Participants

Age represents the number of years that someone has lived since their first birth day. People of different ages tend to differ in many aspects such as legal and social responsibilities, outlook on life and self-perception. More so, it is appreciated that people with differential age brackets may have varied perception with regard to the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community in the county. Consequently, age as a variable was considered vital for the study because it would form the basis for explaining the perception of the youth on the role of the police in ensuring security is restored in Kilifi County and the region. Figure 2 offer a summary of the survey findings.

![Age of Participants](chart)

**Figure 2: Age of Participants**

In Figure 2 it is shown that most (90%) of the respondents were aged between 18-34 years, while the rest (10%) were aged 35 years and above. The inclusion of one tenth (10%) in the study of those aged 35 years and above (Control group), was critical in capturing the views of this age group with regard to the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community.

3). Marital Status of Participants

Marital status is an important socio cultural aspect that defines the involvement of individuals in different societal processes and decision making mechanisms. The world over, and more so, in African societies, the place of family is not substitutable given the fact that families often form the primary unit of socialization(Nagel, 2011), which to a greater extent forms the bedrock of behavioral adaptation. The study aimed at establishing the marital status of the youth, especially on its implication on their perception with regard to the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community in the area. Figure 3 shows the findings of the study with regard to the marital status of the respondents.
It is clear in Figure 3 that over three fifths (61%) of the respondents said that they were single, over one third (36%) were married, while less than one tenth (3%) were divorced/separated. The higher (61%) percentage of the youth reporting to be single is a mirror of the marital status of the youth in the country. This is probably because many of them are still in college or are still looking for livelihood strategies to be able to fend for themselves and prepare for marriage and family life. Significant for this study, the higher (61%) percentage of youth who are single may mirror their perception well with regard to the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community in Kilifi.

4). Level of Education of Participants

Level of education is an important aspect of the society because it offers the foundation of grasping and understanding knowledge, which guides human life. An individual’s level of education may also enhance participation in community activities. More significantly, the level of education of the respondents was considered imperative because it represents the level of awareness of that individual with regard to social issues, including insecurity, role of the police in promoting good relation with the community among others. As such it is expected that individuals who have attained a significant level of education are able to comprehend and articulate the role of the police in security work. Results of the survey are carried in Figure 4.
Findings in Figure 4 reveal that almost three fifths (59.7%) of the respondents had attained some secondary level of education, over one quarter (31.1%) had attained some primary level, and less than one tenth (8.4%) had attained tertiary and university level of education, while less than one tenth (0.8%) had never attended school. In sum, most (91.6%) of the respondents had some secondary and below level of education, with only less than one tenth (8.4%) having college or university education. The implication of this finding is that many of the youths had low levels of education threatening their level of knowledge about community issues, including their perception with regard to the role of the police in security engagements.

**Youth Awareness and Knowledge on the Insecurity Situation in Kilifi County**

A study on the promotion of security must begin with an assessment on the awareness of insecurity situation in the study area. Knowledge of youth awareness on the state of insecurity in the area can open doors for understanding the why and how of insecurity. To achieve this, the study posed a few questions to test the level of awareness of the youth with regard to major threats to insecurity and hence status of security in the county. Discussion of the selected variables is next.
1). Youth Knowledge of Insecurity due to Radicalization and VE in Kilifi County

Since knowledge about causes of general crime such as theft, domestic violence, Gender Based Violence (GBV) is usually common among populations, the study focused on nuanced triggers of insecurity. In this regard, the study attempted to draw attention of the participants to the fact that for quite a while now, the coastal region of Kenya has been synonymous with the ideology of radicalization and VE tendencies. Different regions have received their own fair share of the impacts of these two security challenges. Accordingly, the selected youth in Kilifi County were asked whether they had heard about radicalization leading to VE. Their feedback is captured in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Heard about VE**

From Figure 5 it is clear that most (96%) of the respondents had heard about VE, with way less than one tenth (4%) saying they had not heard about it. Further, it was established during the study that information regarding VE is communicated using different means and modes. Accordingly, those who had heard about it reported that they had received the information from different places that included bus stages, at the mosque, among family members, conversation at the community baraza, friends, from the mainstream media, internet, rallies, and in workshops where issues concerning VE were discussed.

However, from our observations during the study, it was apparent that there is yet to be a consensus on a universal definition of VE. The study reveals that the concept of VE is amorphous in nature and highly dependent on the environment and circumstances of use by the respondents. Nevertheless, some respondents of FGDs and KIIs saw VE to harbor a strong system of beliefs and actions of people who support or use extreme value system through violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political goals. In this case therefore, it was said during our interviews with the various respondents that violent extremist views can be exhibited along a spectrum of issues, including politics, religion and gender relations.
Notably, from the sites surveyed, the respondents demonstrated a deeper understanding of the concept of VE and it was indeed observed that VE occurred in different forms. Some of the manifestations of VE were reported by the respondents as captured in Table 1:

Table 1: Forms of Violence Extremism Mentioned by Participants

- A conflict among/between youth or people participating in destructive activities for political or religious gains that eventually leads to death and loss of property.
- Different forms of harassment meted upon women including rape.
- The youth joining violent groups/gangs and killing innocent people.
- Strong religious difference causing trouble and the youth being recruited to some unlawful groups resulting in violent conflicts.
- Al-Shabaab coming to Kenya and convincing the youth to go to Somalia for easy money to fight *Jihad* and
- Excess use of violence in upholding particular values and motivated violence to achieve radical religious, ideological or political view.
- Use of violence to deal with traditional belief in witchcraft leading to killings of the elderly.
- Unruly behavior of *bodaboda* riders leading to deaths and arson of property, especially vehicles involved in accidents with the riders

Interestingly, despite this level of understanding police officers during the FGDs and KIIs reported that there are very minimal cases of VE in Kilifi County. This finding is in line with the Kilifi County Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (KCAPCVE 2017), where the county is seen to be more of a recruitment and hideout for Al-shabaab returnees than a field of VE actions.

2). Youth Vulnerability to Joining Criminal/VE Groups

There are differentials among individuals or groups in relation to their vulnerability to joining groups that perpetrate violence and extremist dispositions. On the basis of motivating factors ranging from personal to systemic inhibitions, different people in the society may adopt different mechanisms to VE. This therefore warranted this survey to establish youth vulnerability to joining criminal and VE groups in Kilifi County. The study results are captured in Figure 6.
Results in Figure 6 are interesting with over four fifths (84%) of the youth reporting themselves to be more vulnerable to joining criminal gangs or VEOs, while less than one tenth (8%) and (3%) were of the view that anyone, (whether a male or female, youth or old) had equal chances of being a target of criminal gang or VEO recruitment and the view that men are more vulnerable to joining VE groups respectively. The chance of women (2%) and the poor (1%) and Sheikhs (2%) joining VE groups was reported to be very low. The higher (84%) percentage of youth reporting vulnerability is a clear signal of own recognition that they are at-risk of recruitment into criminal gangs or VEOs. This implies that concerted efforts should be sought to institute mitigation measures against youth vulnerability to recruitment into criminal and VEO organizations.

3). Reasons for Youth Vulnerability to Recruitment into Criminal or VE Groups

Statistics show that on average, 40% (UNDP 2017) of the youths are mostly jobless making them an easy prey for recruitment into criminal gangs and VEOs. Moreover, contrary to the popular belief, findings from FGDs and KIIIs revealed that low level of knowledge and information combined with the distorted religious teachings, as well as, wrong interpretation of the Quran based on false and luring religious promises contributed more to the vulnerability of the youth.

Others reasons for vulnerability of the youth to recruitment into criminal and VEOrganizations were cited to include conflict with the police and administration, which spur hatred towards the police putting the youth at-risk of recruitment into criminal or VE groups to take revenge of harassment by police officers. This finding has direct implication to the relationship between the vulnerable youth and the police. Frequent clashes between the police and the youth means heightened tension and hatred, a recipe for recruitment into VEOs.
In other cases, the study was told that the youth are high into drugs hindering their reasoning and capacity, which affects them into accepting any offer, as long as they get money to support their drug habits, falling into the hands of recruiters into crime and VEOs. Significant to note is that, drug abuse means a continuous confrontation with the police possibly souring the relation between the drug users (youth) and the police. Such damaged relationship has repercussions on the part of the youth in enhancing vulnerability to recruitment into VEOs.

It also emerged in one FGD with the police that youth join VEOs due to influence from peers and because they are arrogant and lack respect for elders to the extent of not listening to whatever the elders tell them, especially advice to shun bad friends or joining VEOs. Where the relation within the community is already stale, such as that of the youth and the elders, there is likelihood that such strained relation spills over to other agencies, including the police. The strained relation becomes a fertile ground for recruitment of the youth into criminal gangs and violent extremists groups.

Further, in an FGD with the police, it was revealed that poor upbringing of children in families was largely to blame for the surge in cases of crime and youth joining VEOs. Poor upbringing it was revealed does not provide room for the youth to express a sense of independence in thought and critical mind in social, religious, political and economic well-being, increasing their vulnerability to recruitment into VEOs. Significant for this research is that where there is poor upbringing there is a challenge of successful socialization (Nagel 2011), which may impact on youth vulnerability to recruitment into criminal gangs and VEOs.

**Role of the Police in Promoting Good Relation with the Community**

Understanding the relationship between the community and the police requires knowledge of the roles each play in society. Indeed, the fact that the community and the police operate in the same social spaces, makes it even more prudent to understand their roles in order to isolate those which promote good or bad relations within the community. Accordingly, focus of the study was for the community and the police themselves to provide answers with regard to questions on their perceptions on the role of the police in promoting good relation with the community. The perception of the community with regard to the foregoing is presented next.
1). Community perception on the role of the police in promoting good relations

It is evident in the coastal region, like in the North Eastern region of Kenya that insecurity has become the norm, with serious negative impacts on the economy, especially tourism. Key to the restoration of peace and security in any nation is the role of the police within the communities they operate. This study assessed the perception of the community with regard to the role of the police in promoting law and order that have implication for positive or negative relation with the community. The following are the summarized findings.

- Police are supposed to be in the forefront to fight crime, including VE by use of proper skills. The suggestion was that they can do this without resorting into violence by use of rightful information, (intelligence) which they can secure from the community where there is trust.
- Arresting of suspects and others lawbreakers to enhance peace and security in the community.
- They should caution people on suspected hot spots, where there is evidence of danger of crime, especially VE and they should combat VE,
- Educate the community and create awareness on the effects of insecurity, especially VE and discourage the formation of criminal gangs. Ideally, one of the police role was to ensure they protect lives of people and their property.
- Conducting more patrols to deter criminals, as well as, confronting VE groups and ensuring law and order are maintained.
- Educating the community on alternative means of conflict resolution. This was envisaged by participants to enhance enforcement of the law and prevention of an upsurge of VE, while at the same time convert the youth into agents of peace and security
- Investigating criminal and VE cases with the seriousness they deserve
- Rehabilitate and educate the returnees as opposed to harassing them.
- Warn the youths not to join any VEOs with a view of reducing recruitment into VE in the community
- Building good relation between themselves and the community
- Work closely with locals and gather information in order to mitigate crime and VE by providing a conducive environment for peaceful co-existence.
2). Perception of the Police on their role in Promoting Good Relation with the Community

While perception of the community on the role of the police in promoting peaceful coexistence was important, the police perception of their own role in this was even more critical for this study. This is because knowledge of one’s role may have positive or negative implication on its execution. More significant is the moot point of perceptions with regard to the role of the police in promoting a cordial working relationship with the community. Results of the study on the perception of the police on their own role in promoting good relation with the community are presented next.

One key finding from both the FGDs and KIIs with police officers was that they have a mandate to deal with normal crimes but can’t do much in Countering Violent Extremism. Indeed, the study was told in all the three FGDs with the frontline police officers that VE is a docket of the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU) and not regular police. We were further informed that the major role of the police was to keep law and order. However, the researcher probed on what happens if the regular police received information about a suspected violent extremist. Where there is a case of VE, the regular police simply refers it to the ATPU which specializes in handling such cases. When we asked what goes on there? The study was told that the police are not privy to it as it is not within their mandate. More precisely, the study was told by the police themselves that they can:

- Investigate criminal and VE cases to know the truth of the matter or prosecute or refer the VE cases to the ATPU.
- Use all means available to keep law and order, including using returnees/defectors to show the effect of joining VEOs to the community through participation in awareness and education campaigns mainly for deterrence.
- Follow up on hard core criminals, especially returnees so that they may not go back to those criminal groups and ensure that they are not sent to spy on the community and plan attacks.

3). Police Handling of Crime in the Community

Findings of the study from interviews with the community, FGDs and KIIs with senior security officers point to poor handling of crime by the police, especially violent extremists. The community narrated stories of horror describing how police swoops are conducted to net the suspected culprits. The study was told that whenever the police undertake a security swoop to capture a suspected Al-shabaab, many innocent youth suffer and families get humiliated by the police. When the community members were asked about their perception with regard to police handling of violent extremists, the following findings in Figure 7 provide full testimony of the rating.
Findings in Figure 7 reveal that over three fifths (74.1%) of the respondents indicated that police handling of VE issues either poor (49.1%) or very poor (25%), while only slightly over one quarter (25.9%) were of the contrary opinion. The larger (74.1%) percentage of the community saying police are not well placed to handle VE issues can be explained in two folds. First, may be because terrorism is a new social phenomenon in the security sector and hence many of the trained personnel have no knowledge about how to deal with it. Second, may be that the community has no confidence or trust with the police.

From the study findings it is clear that the relation between the community and the police is not good. This the study was told to be due to lack of trust, confidentiality and the use of force by the police despite the fact that they are now a police service in arresting criminals. However, we probed the respondents further to get details on the low confidence with the police to handle VE issues. The study was informed by the respondents that police have not been in a position to respond to VE issues because of a number of reasons. Key among these was corruption, cited as the leading cause as to why the relation between the police and the community in the prevention and CVE has been weak. To our surprise, reports from the respondents indicated that most of the police officers are easily manipulated and in some instances alleged to receive handouts from suspects in the community, hence it becomes hard for them to tackle VE. In a FGD with the security agents, the police themselves reported that their terms of service, especially remuneration is poor. One of the police officers actually put it aptly when he reiterated that when we see a client coming to the station, it’s like we have seen a savior who may top up our meagre income. This observation aptly support the observation made by the community members with regard to the ineffectiveness of the police to handle VE due to their vulnerability to bribes and corrupt practices.

Figure 7: Rating of police handling of VE
Moreover, from interviews with the community it also emerged that police were reported to be extremely harsh towards the youth when it comes to handling VE cases. This was conceived by the participants as amounting to harassment and violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The study was told that police are not friendly to the community members and they use excessive force and brutality in dealing with VE even when one is simply a suspect. There were allegations also that in other cases the police use live bullets to kill the suspects. Allegations of disappearances and abductions by the police meted on suspected Al-shabaab fighters were also mentioned by the participants.

When we asked the participants what they think would be the best approach to handle VE issues by the police. They were categorical to say that violence cannot be solved by violence…..never the answer …..but this can be solved by the police to be close to the people and be flexible with the community so as to get first-hand information instead of speculations about the suspects. Indeed, it was said during the interviews that this to a greater extent jeopardizes the effort to prevent and CVE by the police as it introduces fear and intimidation. Accordingly, fear makes it difficult for the community members to report incidences of VE to the police. This is probably because of the harshness of the police or because of fear of victimization and standing witness in a court of law. In fact, the later was aptly captured in a FGD by the police where it was said that the community, especially the youth fear the police...when they see us (the police) they run away or when they witness a crime they will always be in denial that they saw what happened...when you insist to them to tell you what they saw they say “Simanya” (literary translated to mean: I don’t Know).

**Conclusion**

From the findings of the study three sets of conclusions can be adduced, first, that insecurity in a problem in the county and that the youth perceive themselves as the most vulnerable group to recruitment into criminal gangs and VEOs. This perception is shared by both the frontline police officers and senior government administrators in the county. Second, the study reveals a plethora of reasons for youth vulnerability to recruitment into criminal gangs and VEOs in the county. Some of the reasons include unemployment, peer pressure, drug abuse, poor parenting, poor relation between the police and youth fuelling hatred and a sense of revenge due to perceived police harassment by the youth. Third, is the status of the relationship between the community and the police, which is generally weak. This finding is critical for effective mitigation of insecurity in the county in that successful crime prevention and mitigation mechanisms will require cooperation between the police and the local community. Where the relation between them is tense or poor, there is therefore no ownership of the problem of insecurity and hence solutions to the problem become illusive. Accordingly, the present study avails an opportunity for security experts to innovatively design inclusive and participatory approaches to mitigate the sour relation between the community and the police for better security in the county.
Recommendations

From the results of the study a number of recommendations can be proposed:

(i) Policy recommendations

Through their advocacy role and lobbying Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should push for:

- The need to change the training policy of the police to include soft skills in police training such as public relations, participatory policing, communication and social relations skills among others. This will help in transforming the police force into police service with consequent effects on the strengthening of the community-police relations for effective crime prevention and mitigation.
- Reforms in the policy and procedures of police operations to allow the police use other skills they have to enhance law and order in society. It was revealed that some police have trainings in other professional areas but are not using them simply because they are police and mandated only to do police work, keeping law and order.
- Government to review its policy to include more in police work the community whose security is to be ensured. As people participate more in their own security, there develop a sense of ownership and responsibility which can enhance the relation between the police and the community.

(ii) Practical recommendations

- Community Dialogues (CDs): Dialogue should take place periodically (probably quarterly) to bringing the community (groups) to meet and have dialogues on security matters among themselves. This will increase interaction and awareness on the role of the community in promoting good relation with the police to enhance security in the county.
- Community-Police Dialogues (CPDs): Dialogue between the community and the police on peace and security issues, crime reporting and processing procedures, CVE, and the need to strengthen the community-police relation in the area through trust building and mitigation of the community fear of the police.
- Community-Police Inclusive Activities (CPIAs): The weak relation between the police and the community can be strengthened to a strong community-police relation by fostering joint activities such as sports, culture and music for trust building and demystifying the police to the community, helping it to deal with the police fear factor.
- Community Awareness, Communication and Education (CACE) on insecurity and CVE among the community members and the police and the need for a stronger relation to prevent and CVE through police participating in beach activities, sensitization of the community on the importance of being close to the police through seminars, **barazas** by village elders, get together and open forums to discuss the strained relation freely without fear of victimization.
Establishment of a CVE desk at the police station, where there is confidentiality in the reporting and communicating VE issues and the personnel manning such desks to be professional and well versed in customer relations, ethical issues, especially confidentiality. Such a move may help allay fears of the community to report sensitive crimes such as radicalization, recruitment into VEOs and violent extremism.

Socialization of the importance of peace and security. The public should be socialized into embracing peace and security as the most basic of the basic human needs and wants in the family, school, by peers, in religious institutions and the mass media. They should also be socialized on the importance of community-police relations in the prevention and mitigation of crime.

- Educate the public on the role of the various agents of the Criminal Justice System (CJS), showing the link between the public, the police, judiciary and our correctional institutions.
- Strengthen the capacity of other crime reporting channels other than the police stations because many of the community members’ don’t prefer reporting to the police stations.
- Build the police and the community on information and knowledge of how to deal with issues of VE and how to participate in CVE as stakeholders in the prevention and CVE.

(iii) Research recommendation

More research is needed to assess the effectiveness and document all the efforts geared towards enhancing community-police relations in Kilifi County and the coastal region.

More studies are needed to establish how best the community-police relation can be strengthened in the county to mitigate crime and P/CVE.

Comparative studies are needed across counties, regions and even countries to document lessons learnt, success stories and best practices of strengthening community-police relation in mitigating crime and P/CVE.
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