Executive summary

Securing communities and transforming policing cultures

A desk study of community policing in Jamaica

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This case study examines the latest iteration of community policing implemented in Jamaica since 2008/2009 by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF). It is part of ODI's [Securing Communities project](#), which aims to examine different models of community policing around the world, to understand their diversity of objectives, approaches and methods, and what this might mean for those who aim to support community policing.

The Jamaica case study offers a unique context *vis-à-vis* the other case studies under the Securing Communities project, due to the high levels of urban violent crime affecting the country which present distinct challenges for community policing. In addition, it is a valuable example of a community policing programme which has been a formal state-led process, but has taken place in a security and justice arena that has received significant support from multiple donors.

Community policing in Jamaica has been shaped by a number of contextual factors including, in particular, high levels of violent crime which have been fuelled by socio-economic problems and the historical nexus between crime, corruption and a political culture of patronage. This has encouraged the continuation of paramilitary styles of policing that emerged from histories of slavery and colonialism and has perpetuated a deep mistrust in the police among many community members, especially in the urban communities most affected by crime. High levels of violent crime and police corruption have weakened police-community relations and meant that reliance on informal security structures has become engrained in local cultures of protection.

It was in an attempt to grapple with the high levels of violent crime in Jamaica's inner-city communities, that the country's internal security forces began to experiment with community policing in the 1990s in order to build trust between the community and the police as a means of addressing the root causes of crime and thus to reduce criminal violence. However, while there have been various attempts to implement community policing since the early 1990s, and community policing was accepted as the overall philosophy of the JCF, these attempts were limited to pilots in particular communities of Jamaica and it was not until 2008/09 that there was a concerted effort to ensure the widespread application of the JCF's community policing approach.

While community policing is supposed to be a force-wide philosophy and not a specialist function in the JCF, in practices, this has not been the case. Instead, it has largely been carried out by dedicated Community Security and Safety Branch (CSSB) officers who work in close collaboration with residents of the communities they are posted to, with a stated remit to concentrate on 'proactive, practical problem-solving'.

Although there is a broad consensus among the main stakeholders on the underlying objectives of community policing – crime reduction and improving police-community relations – different actors place varying emphasis on how to achieve them. Communities, for instance, focus on accountability for police behaviour while the police focus on intelligence collection. In addition, while all stakeholders might agree on the imperative to reduce crime, they also operate with some differences in terms of what 'crime' is perceived to mean. These variations in the objectives of community policing play an important role in how community policing is operationalised.

Although initial survey data suggests that violent crime has been reducing in Jamaica since 2010 and that there has been some improvement in police-community relations, it is extremely difficult to attribute any tangible progress in these indicators to community policing specifically. Community policing is just one pillar of a multifaceted national public sector reform strategy which has been ongoing since the 1990s and there are likely to be other factors that also help to explain these overall reductions in crime.

Institutionalising community policing in Jamaica faces a number of challenges. First, despite formally being a force-wide philosophy, community policing has remained primarily the reserve of the CSSB, and has not yet

brought about the force-wide behavioural change necessary to alter the dominant culture of the JCF. Second, the significant costs borne by donors in funding community policing in Jamaica raises serious questions about the sustainability of community policing in the long term. Third, the progress which can be made in crime reduction and improving police-community relations through improvement in policing will continue to be frustrated until urgent reforms to address the inefficiencies of the justice sector are also undertaken, given the interconnectedness of these sectors.

For external actors looking to engage in community policing, this case study reveals a need for realism about what community policing can achieve in a context with the levels of institutionalised violence of Jamaica. Changing the culture of police forces is never a straightforward process; it is particularly challenging in a context in which extreme levels of violence incentivise the continuation of long-hold cultures of paramilitarism. While community policing has demonstrated some degree of success in some Communities in improving safety, it has thus far proved far from a panacea.

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