

Doing Security by Doing Development: A Study of Community-led Security Initiatives in Kenya

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Policy discourses on crime and insecurity remain significantly dominated by state security actors. This dominance has meant the privileging of law enforcement measures in responding to the problems of criminal violence and insecurity. This state dominance is however changing.

Where community-led initiatives on security and crime have emerged, response techniques have ventured beyond law enforcement, reflecting complex readings of criminal violence and integrating preventive and developmental interventions. As a result, doing security in the absence of state-security dominance begins to look more like doing “development”.

In the last few years, two security threats have received significant public and policy attention in Kenya, namely, the problem of terrorism related to Al Qaeda and its affiliates in East Africa and the problem of the criminal violence linked to the *Mungiki* youth movement. In both cases, the preferred state response has been aggressive law enforcement, through arrests, prosecutions and detentions of suspected members. Many analysts have questioned the effectiveness of this police- and- prison approach.

In contrast, emerging community-led initiatives which incorporate development and preventive techniques in response to these security problems promise a more sustainable solution to radicalization and violence. This paper seeks to develop this argument through the study of two cases of community-led security initiatives in poor urban neighborhoods of Kenya. The paper will draw from field studies as well as policy debates on crime and insecurity in Kenya.