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CHAPTER 13
Community policing

Learning objectives for Chapter 13

After completing this chapter you should be able to:

- *Define community policing, stating its main components*

- *Describe how community policing is different from 'traditional' policing*

- *Give four advantages for the community when community policing is implemented, and the human rights impact of this approach*

- *Explain how community policing would help police officers in enforcing the law and solving local problems*

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13.1. Introduction

The 21st century has brought many new challenges for police services all over the world. Criminal methods are becoming more sophisticated, and traditional policing methods of combating crime may not be as effective. The 'traditional' police model of preventative patrols, response to criminal incidents and investigative follow-up are certainly necessary, but by themselves they are not sufficient to effectively fight crime. Furthermore, the dependence on high technology to fight crime is helpful and important, but is also not, on its own, enough (and police resources especially in developing countries are often inadequate to support the 'high tech' approach to fighting crime). There are complex problems of finding better ways make policing relevant in mixed societies.

As a result, in many countries police services have 'discovered' that they need to form partnerships with the community in order to fight crime more effectively. This should not really come as a surprise – common sense dictates that the prevention and investigation of criminal behaviour, and other policing functions, are most effective when carried out with the full co-operation of the local community. Indeed, while some traditional methods of policing are outdated, it is fair to say that police services have 're-discovered' a central element of 'old style' policing, which was premised on trusting, supportive relationships with local communities at station level.

Community policing forms an integral part of the notion of any human rights-based approach to policing. By working closely with the community to prevent and solve crime, police are in a position to better protect the rights of the community, in particular of vulnerable groups. On the other hand, the community is in a good position to ensure that the police act in a professional and transparent way, and that they respect basic human rights.

Law enforcement is fundamentally about people – about personal relationships and management of people. It is about serving and protecting people and their basic human rights. It includes ensuring that police themselves are not vulnerable and are welcome in their communities. Hence, law enforcement cannot take place in isolation. Community policing has been developed as an operational strategy in response to the realities of change confronting police forces. It is also a strategy and principle which supports human rights, wider good governance and democratic policing.

13.2. Features of community policing

There are many different definitions of community policing. There are a few basic ingredients that are universal:

● One of the most important ingredients is the partnership between police and the community.

● The main aims of community policing are to prevent and reduce criminal behaviour and the criminalisation of youth, and to combat and solve crime.

● Community policing promotes better relationships between the police and the community and promotes respect for human rights.

Community policing is an institutional philosophy, a management style, and an organisational strategy that promotes proactive partnerships between the police and the community to address the causes of crime, fear of crime and other community issues. It accepts that the police can only effectively and efficiently solve problems related to crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighbourhood decay, if the citizens and the police enjoy mutual trust, respect and co-operation. The ultimate goal is an active and equal partnership between the police and the public through which crime and other community safety issues can be jointly determined, and solutions designed and implemented.

Two points on Community Policing

1. From a trainer's perspective, the idea of community policing should be made to relate to the habits and behaviours of individual officers and at station command level – it is not only a macro-philosophy applicable only to senior police management levels.

2. The police should not wait for the community to engage with them. Instead, police officers at all levels should reach out to the community and lead the way.

3.3.   Why community policing?

There are many reasons for implementing community policing as an operational strategy. The most important include the following:

● The so called 'democratic imperative' – that police serve the community. There is a growing demand by the public for more professional, responsive and 'customer oriented' policing. Police are expected to be more accountable to the community as well as more transparent.

● There are unrealistic expectations on the part of the community about the effectiveness of traditional police responses. There is a gap between what the police know they can manage to do, and what the community expect of them, which suggests the need for better educational outreach by the police.

● There is growing evidence of the shortcomings of current policing approaches in providing a long-term answer to crime and problems of disorder.

● Criminals live in the community. The community is therefore the best source of intelligence and information and even evidence. Poor community relations can seriously affect the quality of police work.

● There is a growing realisation that in the absence of close community support, no increase in authority, money, personnel, or technology will enable the police to deal with the burden of crime. In any case, there is strong evidence that police resources will become ever more scarce in the future, and that the police will be forced to do more with less.

- There is an increase in awareness of societal and economic factors as drivers of criminal conduct and criminalisation of youth.

Experience from countries where deliberate community policing initiatives have been implemented indicates that it offers several distinct advantages:

- reduced incidence of crime and a reduction in fear of victimisation;

- increased citizen satisfaction with the services provided by the police;

- better co-ordination and allocation of responsibilities between the police and other criminal justice and social service agencies;

- more opportunities for proactive action;

- the full support of the community for the efforts of the police;

- the support of the community for efforts aimed at supplementing or obtaining more police resources;

- the active participation of the community in crime prevention and problem-solving activities;

- a greater willingness on the part of the community members to report crime, give information and co-operate in investigations;

- enhanced partnership between the police and the public generally leads to a better appreciation of the constraints and problems confronting the police; and

- increased job satisfaction for police personnel – especially patrol officers – and better recruitment and retention.

3.4. Principles of community policing

Some of the basic principles of community policing are as follows:

- Community policing should promote the reassessment of the question 'who is responsible for public safety?', and it redefines the roles and relationships between the police and the community.

- It should promote openness and respect for human rights.

- Community policing requires shared ownership, decision-making and accountability, as well as a sustained commitment from both the police and the community.

- It reinforces the role of the police officer as providing law enforcement through serving the community rather than through threat or use of force.

- It also establishes new public expectations of the police and standards whereby the effectiveness of the work done by the police is measured – for example, response time and arrest/crime statistics, including quality of service, customer (community) satisfaction, responsiveness to community-defined issues, and cultural sensitivity indicators.

- It increases understanding and trust between the police and members of the community.

- Community policing empowers and strengthens community-based efforts.

- It also requires an ongoing commitment to developing long-term and proactive programmes or strategies to address the underlying conditions that create problems in the community.

- It requires knowledge of which resources and skills are available in the community and how they can be obtained and used, as well as the ability to develop new resources within the community.

- Community policing requires commitment from the top management of the police and other local government agencies, as well as sustained personal commitment from all levels of management and other key personnel.

- It decentralises police services, operations and management, relaxes the traditional 'chain of command', and encourages innovative and creative problem-solving, thereby making fuller use of the knowledge, skills and expertise of the members of the organisation.

- It also shifts the focus of police work from responding to individual incidents, to addressing problems that are identified by the community and the police, stressing the use of problem-solving approaches to implement traditional law-enforcement methods.

- It requires a commitment to the development of new skills through training – for example, problem-solving, networking, mediation, facilitation, conflict resolution, cultural competency or literacy.

Community policing challenges police and civil officials to provide the leadership that is necessary to address the issues which communities face. Community policing focuses on neighbourhood maintenance and revitalisation if necessary, and it advances creative, proactive and comprehensive responses to social epidemics such as gangsterism, drug-dealing and social disorders (for example, alcohol abuse, domestic violence and child molestation).

3.5.   International human rights standards applicable to community policing
There are some basic international standards or guidelines for police officers that can be applied when implementing community policing: They are the following:

- **Establish a partnership between police and the community**
  It is important for police to establish a partnership with community members.
  This can be done in different ways. In some countries community and police work together in community police forums or crime prevention forums. The important element of this guideline is that police and community should work together in a proactive way to prevent and also solve crime.

● **Adopt a community relations policy and plan of action**
Police should develop and adopt policies and plans of action on how to implement community policing and how to improve police-community relations.

● **Recruit from all sectors of the community**
Police should represent all sectors of the community. This will help to create better communication and relations with all sectors of the community. It will also promote the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

● **Train officers to deal with diversity**
The world is becoming a smaller place. With modern transport and communication, more and more people are moving and migrating to different countries all over the world. Communities are becoming more diverse. Police officers have to deal with diverse societies and should be trained in how to deal with cultural diversity.

● **Establish community outreach and public information programmes**
Police should promote the principles of community policing by educating the public and informing them about the police and their role in society. This can be done through community outreach and public information programmes.

● **Liaise regularly with all groups in the community**
There should be good and effective communications between the police and the community. One way is to develop proper channels of communication with groups in the community, and then make sure that there is continuous and regular communication. This can be done through, for example, community policing or crime prevention forums. The names and functions of these forums may differ from country to country.

● **Build contacts with the community through non-enforcement activities**
Police should also get involved in other activities in the community, for example, social or recreational events. This will create trust and familiarity between police and the community.

● **Assign officers to a permanent neighbourhood beat**
Community policing is a philosophy that should apply to every police officer. Every police officer should promote and apply the principles of community policing and respect for human rights. It is important, however, that certain police officers should be involved in permanent neighbourhood beats.

● **Increase community participation in policing activities and community-based public safety programmes**
The role of police is to protect and serve the community. It is important for the community to have a say in their own protection and safety. Therefore, it is necessary for community members to participate in policing activities and to assist the police in developing community-based public safety programmes.

● **Involve the community in identifying problems and concerns**
Community members should be given the opportunity to provide inputs to the police on their problems and concerns for the area where they stay.

● **Use a creative problem-solving approach to develop responses to specific community problems, including non-traditional tactics and strategies**

With a more sophisticated criminal element, police have to come up with more creative ideas to solve problems in the community. Police should always strive to develop new innovative approaches and tactics to cope with new trends, developments and crime.

● **Co-ordinate policies, strategies and activities with other government agencies, and with non-governmental organisations**

There are many agencies and organisations which are also involved in community projects, crime prevention, and the study of crime and related subjects. Police should co-ordinate with these organisations to develop policies, strategies and activities to deal with crime.

> **The Media – A Resource for Police**
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> Members of the media are one very important resource in a comprehensive rights-based crime prevention and investigation strategy. Trainers should consider discussing with police trainees how more proactive engagement by police with the media might contribute positively to their operational needs. In cases of missing persons, or where information is sought from the community, the media may be indispensable and a proactive outreach to them is suggested.

3.6.   Summary

The community is a resource in the prevention and investigation of crime. It is also the level at which police officers must live and work. Community policing focuses on the establishment of a partnership between the police and the public (including the media). It supports a human rights-based approach to policing and helps to create an open and transparent police. It recognises and accepts a role of the community in determination of priorities and delivery of police services. See also Chapter 15 on 'Police command and management'.

3.7.   Questions for self-evaluation

● *What do you understand about the term 'community policing'.*

● *Describe some of the basic principles of community policing.*

● *Name five advantages of community policing for police officers and for the community, and five initiatives that can be taken.*