

## **Community Security Initiatives in low-income areas of Kampala**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is derived from a study on alternative community-based security mechanisms in low-income urban areas of Kampala-Uganda. The objective was to understand how low income areas negotiated their security against the background of weak, unresponsive, abusive and inefficient state security systems. Yowana Maria Muzeei and Kifumbira were purposively sampled, and both in-depth and Focus Group Discussions were applied to obtain information which was enriched by secondary sources. We trace the rise of the non-state security nodes; analyse their legitimacy and modus operandi; highlight the relationship between the state and alternative security nodes and assesses their effectiveness. Major findings pointed to a complex and multi-layered security governance space against the perception of state dominance of security governance. The conventional and non-state security nodes showed complementary, but also conflictual relations; with intersections, modifications, adoptions and overlaps. The paper concludes that alternative security nodes were crucial in security governance, hence needed support.*

**Keywords:** State, Community, Security-initiatives, Urban, Kampala

### **Introduction**

This paper explores alternative community-led security mechanisms in low-income urban areas of Kampala and assesses their effectiveness. State absence, weakness and inefficiency precipitated the rise of community mechanisms aimed at maintenance of security and self-support (Baker, 2004). Such alternative community security initiatives are often placed in the realm of “boundary institutions” and laid between the grey areas of formal and informal, legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate thus neither fit in the traditional categories of state nor private security institutions (Lund, 2006).

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So were their leaders who derived authority from informal legitimacy as elders, opinion leaders, command of respectability and the express “courts” and punishments, which were conventionally “illegal”. However, this approach fails to appreciate the capacities and contributions of community-based mechanisms in the governance of security.

The dominant perception placed security in the domain of state responsibility. The state was largely constituted as an organ of formal authority, punishment, foreign principles and values, with enforcing agents that were formally trained in established institutions. The state and its institutions were considered to possess the expertise while citizens were believed to be uninformed and passive recipients of services and programmes. As a result, the state continued to govern security through agencies that use force and the threat of force (O'Malley and Palmer, 1996). Yet alternative security and support systems tended to continue whether the state systems were strong or not (Scharf and Nina, 2001).

In urban communities of Kampala, security mentalities and concerns revolved around several factors, notably, inadequate state security due to weakness, failure and inefficiencies; increase of unemployment and crime from idlers, strangers and drug abusers. Major crimes included murder, rape, theft and robbery and vulnerable spots include residences, Guest-Houses, commercial premise, isolated dark spots, abandoned/incomplete construction sites, night clubs and slums most of which were in low-income areas.

First, this paper shows that there were cases of synergy between community-led initiatives and state security systems, hence complimentary in the security governance space. For instance, a security initiative started by the community was sometimes modified and adopted by the state thus became “formal”. Likewise, an initiative started by the state was sometimes adopted and domesticated by the community, hence qualified as a “community system”. However, there were also some conflictual relations that rose out of the grey area in which community security initiatives were situated. Secondly, the paper underlines the effectiveness of the alternative community-led systems because they were embedded within the communities and served a wide range of aspects than the conventional state agencies. As Shearing and Wood note, such effectiveness points to the potential of local capacity when retrieved, reaffirmed and re-institutionalized

in ways that enhance the self-direction of poor communities through strengthening their “collective capital” (Shearing and Wood, 2003).

In our study sites of Yowana Maria Muzeei and Kifumbira, different low-income groups lived together in urban marginal areas within networks of trust and obligation, where they formed their own formal and informal support and security initiatives. Both Kifumbira and Yowana Maria Muzeei are typically heterogeneous and congested slums reputed for high insecurity and crime, especially theft and aggravated robbery. As a result, the resident communities evolved their own security initiatives, hence the purposive sampling of Kifumbira and Yowana Maria Muzeei as suitable representative samples for the study. Kifumbira and Yowana Maria Muzeei epitomise what Shearing and Wood note as constant changes in security governance and reconfiguration of collective life leading to discovery of a host of non-state affiliations and associated expectations (Shearing and Wood, 2003:401). In our samples, information was obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with residents and in-depth interviews with purposively sampled community leaders and state security officials, notably the public police (see appendices).

#### **Insecurity, role of police and community initiatives, 1979-2016**

Contemporary Community Security initiatives in Uganda can be traced to the Idi Amin era, which was characterised by political chaos and rampant insecurity. This was against the backdrop of a weak state and degenerate security institutions. The fall of the Amin regime after the 1979 war was followed by power lacunae, which exacerbated insecurity. There was proliferation of fighting factions and defeated soldiers filtered into society and formed armed gangs that aggravated turbulence. Subsequently, the post-Amin period was rife with crime, murders and robberies that were fuelled by a lot of guns that were left by fleeing soldiers and in possession of the numerous fighting groups and wrong elements. Police inefficiency in handling the rampant insecurity led to new initiatives whereby the communities supplemented the police in the arena of security governance. Alternative community security/“express courts” and “punishments” emanated from diminishing public trust and confidence in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). As noted, the slow case disposal rate of 30% in the CJS fuelled the misconception that the legal process was a waste of time (Kisembo, 2002). The rise to prominence of the alternative non-state security mechanisms was a *fait accompli*, thus the state no longer “did it alone” or monopolised security governance (Garland, 1996; Clapham, 1999).

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After the overthrow of Idi Amin, the liberators who came through Tanzania introduced the ten cell community-level administrative system “*nyumba kumi*” (*mayumba kumi*) which was in use in Tanzania. The ten cell system was also akin to the American neighbourhood watch system (community policing). Owing to the rampant insecurity, there was already an emerging trend within the communities towards community-based security systems, which blended well with the new *mayumba-kumi* system. Subsequently, both the state and communities adopted the *mayumba kumi* to bolster the weak, insufficient and inefficient state security system. Although the *mayumba kumi* system was credited for restoring security in communities, it was short-lived. This was because the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) government, which took over power in 1980, favoured the traditional state formal administrative structure of appointed Chiefs, UPC party leaders and vigilantes as security enforcers. The following National Resistance Movement (NRM) government which took over in 1986 introduced community-based Resistance Councils (RCs) which were later renamed Local Councils (LCs) that continue to operate to-date. The RCs and later the LCs had a component of Local Defence Units (LDUs) which were up-graded to Crime Preventers during the run-up to the 2016 general Parliamentary and Presidential elections.

The Police was responsible for keeping law, order and security, yet as an institution, it had degenerated under the Idi Amin regime and subsequent periods of political turmoil. The police force was small; ill-equipped, poorly facilitated and remunerated thus prone to compromise, corruption hence inefficient and untrusted. Nonetheless, the police remained the major security enforcement institution in communities. FGD participants maintained that the police possessed the ultimate responsibility of maintaining security because it was a formal institution with professionally trained and empowered personnel to handle criminal matters, arrest and interrogate suspects. The police remained relevant due to dangers beyond the capacity of local community security arrangements, for instance; armed robbers and criminals.

Despite the rise of alternative community-based mechanisms, the perception of security as the responsibility of the state persisted. For instance, according to respondents, the most important role of the police was their mere presence, which instilled deterrence. Respondents maintained that people felt very secure when they saw a police patrol car parked or moving through their community. Respondents, however, noted that the police patrols were

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largely confined along major roads thus hardly penetrated inner-city communities to unearth criminals. Accordingly, the police worked closely with the communities, which informed them about suspected criminals, hence, the complementarity between the nodes that engendered effective security governance. In some areas, police booths were installed for emergency or swift action rather than having to rely on far away police posts.

### **Community Security Initiatives under the NRM government**

From the on-set, the NRM government sought to dismantle the administrative institution of Chiefs, which was considered undemocratic. The NRM created hierarchical community based Resistance Council (RC) administrative systems, which were later transformed into Local Councils (LCs) with increased mandate to the communities. The LCs started at village level with LC1 committee up to LC 5 at District levels. The aspect of community-based security was imbedded within the RCs and later LCs, whereby one of the 10 LC 1 committee officials had to be a Secretary for Defence who worked with a Local Defence Unit (LDU) team.

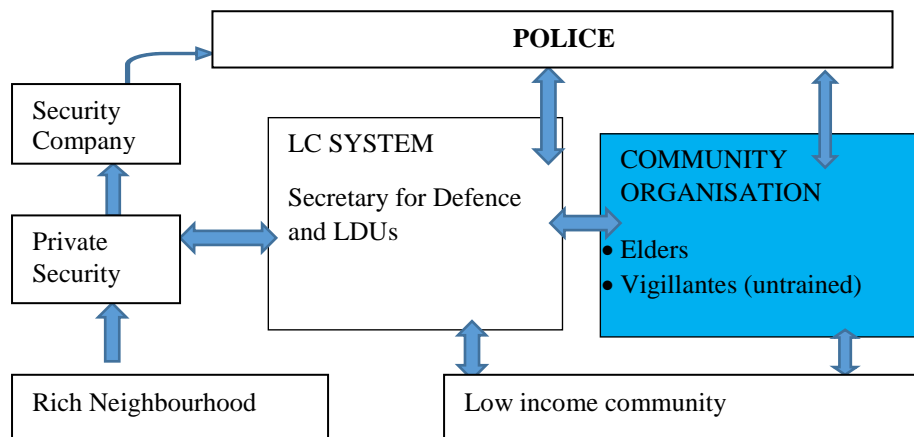
The LDU team was nominated by the village LC1 committee from among able-bodied volunteer residents, and they carried out night patrols to ensure security in their respective communities. The LDU was a hybrid initiative that was born-out of a state-led initiative, which was adopted, domesticated and up-graded by communities. The LDU was a *quasi*-formal, legal and legitimate system that was organised and sustained by communities but also sometimes given firearms by the state. However, the state did not leave the LDUs to be entirely independent community organs, ostensibly because of Uganda's unique turbulent history. Accordingly, the state remains at the centre of security governance to safeguard its political interests *cum* "security concerns".

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The LC and LDU systems were particularly efficient in the low-cost urban communities. Earlier research underscored the dominance and effectiveness of the LCs and LDUs in maintaining security in their communities (Tapscott, 2017). In McMurray’s research, 30% of the respondents reported that they were dependent on the LCs in cases of criminal victimisation, and only 17% of the respondents depended on the police (McMurray, cited in Arojjo, 2002:22). By 2002, the effectiveness of the LDUs in maintaining security in their communities was evident. Research by Arojjo revealed that 91% of respondents found LDUs more helpful in protecting the local council zones (Arojjo, 2002:21).

With the rise of different nodes during the post Idi Amin era, the security governance space was fundamentally re-constituted. Figure 1 presents the typology of security governance nodes from 1986 when the NRM government took over up to 2002.

**Fig.1: Different security governance nodes in Kampala City, 1986-2002**



Source: Author’s construction based on field findings

From Fig 1, three assemblages in the urban security governance landscape can be discerned, namely the state nodes, the corporate or business nodes and the community nodes (Turner, 2001). Fig 1 also shows that at the apex of security governance, there was the formal state security apparatus, notably the police. Fig 1 further shows that while the rich neighbourhoods were under the LC system, they often had their own corporate or business security

services some of which included Private Security Guards (PSGs). The PSGs were provided by registered Private Security Companies, which were regulated by the minister for internal affairs under section 74(1)(p) of the Police Act. Regulations of the Private Security Companies covered aspects like operations, conditions of employment, use of uniforms and other equipment (Police Act, 1974: 74(1)). In contrast, the low income urban areas relied on the Local Council (LC) system as their major organisational and security structure. This resonates with the observation that poor people were for the most part excluded from market-based arrangements in their capacity as 'flawed consumers' due to inequality and low purchasing power (Shearing and Wood, 2003:412-414).

Although the LC1 system was initiated by the NRM government and approximated a formal structure, its officials were not remunerated by the state but through unofficial community levies. Most LC1 leaders were alongside community leaders like elders, opinion leaders, respectable leaders, clan leaders while in some communities the LC's *quasi* formal LDUs found parallels in vigilantes. This presented a complex matrix of community "boundary institutions" that played multiple roles of community security and support.

Over the last 30-year period, there were also some initiatives, which were started by the communities and were adopted by the state, for instance, the Resident Identification Cards (RIDs). The RIDs were precipitated by the community's need to track idlers, strangers, drug abusers and criminals who fuelled insecurity within the communities. Subsequently, the RID initiative was considered to have contributed to the state's idea of National Identity Cards (NICs). Likewise, the community initiative of Guest House Patrols due to crimes of murders rape, theft rampant in Guest Houses also led to the state's formalisation of Guest House registration and taxation.

#### **Resources, partnerships and information**

Community-security initiatives remained in the grey area as "boundary institution", with no formal registration. However, this pseudo-formal status constrained the community security initiatives in forging partnerships and attracting resources beyond the communities and state. Community-security initiatives were superintended by the formal security system, thus had to operate under the ambit or as appendages of the police. Community-security initiatives were, therefore, not legal entities to formally partner with agencies like donors to acquire funds and resources. Owing to the sensitivity of

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security issues associated with Uganda's political history, non-state security initiatives could not engage in independent parallel partnerships or resource mobilisation, as this could be misconstrued as a security threat thus attract state action. To "remain clean", community-security initiatives relied on what the communities offered through LCs; the Police and the civil authorities such as the Resident City Commissioner (Interviews, Principal Respondents, 3-15 August 2016, Kampala).

Information was a major resource for security governance, hence was well streamlined and co-ordinated within the security apparatus for easy monitoring. For easy information flow, the police throughout the country was divided into divisions as administrative units, each with a community liaison officer who was in-charge of information relating to communities and the police. Additionally, there was the office of the Resident City Commissioner (RCC) who is the representative of the President in the area. By law, the RCC is the head of security in the District, and doubled as the chief mobiliser and monitor of government programs and information dissemination.

#### **Changes in Community Security System, 2002-2016**

In urban centres, insecurity remained a major and increasingly sophisticated problem both in high and low-income areas. Some perpetrators had security training background; used new technology like ICT; accessed the numerous fire arms that were in circulation, and used convenient transporters notably special hire vehicles and motorcycles (*bodabodas*). Yet the regular police remained numerically small and poorly facilitated to effectively cover all areas and engage the perpetrators. According to the Commissioner of Police in Charge of Community Affairs, the Neighbourhood Watch and Crime Prevention panels were introduced in 2002 with the aim of encouraging grassroots participation in maintaining security (Kasingye, 2002). These initiatives grew into the Community Policing system, which was, however, largely adopted by rich neighbourhoods like Muyenga in Makindye Division in Kampala. This was mainly because Community Policing utilised resources, for instance, the advanced technology of "Whats up" networks, which were not easily afforded by the low-income communities (Interviews, Principal Respondents, 3 - 15 August 2016, Kampala).

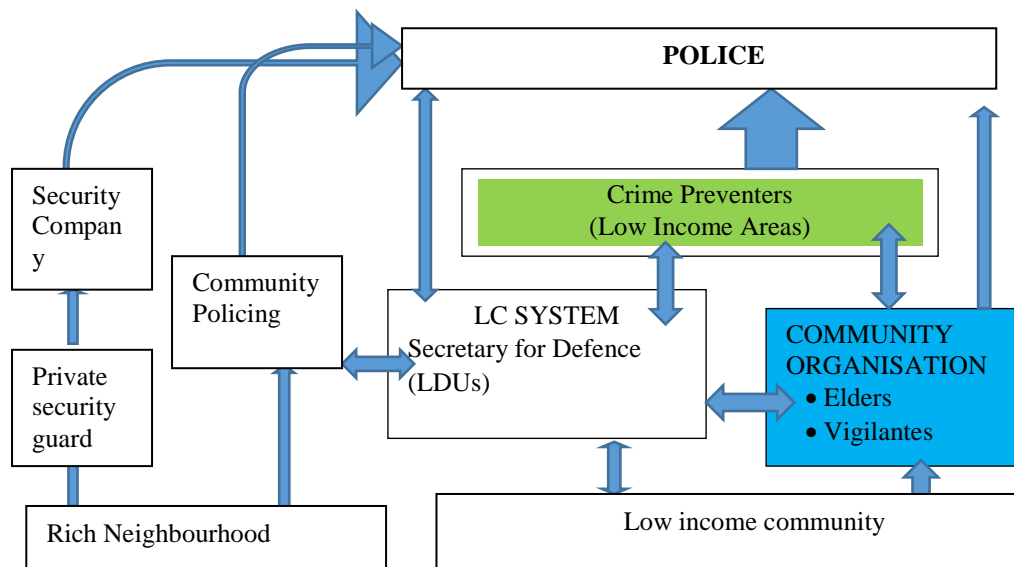
Towards the 2016 general Parliamentary and Presidential elections in Uganda, the state upgraded the community-based LDUs to Crime Preventers to supplement the police. The upgrade of the LDUs was ostensibly for



cracking down the insecurity, which was anticipated during the election period. This shift from LDUs to Crime Preventers presents the ever-changing state-society relations on Uganda’s security governance landscape. As noted, the state in Uganda maintains a stake in sectors of political interests that become “security” issues, which defined the state/community security interface. Crime Preventers were selected from LDUs and given both police and political training to instil political loyalty.

Crime Preventers were akin to an earlier political whip-wielding vigilante group that was known as the *kiboko* (whip) squad, which was dissolved due to public out-cry. Crime Preventers could, therefore, be a replacement of the vigilante *kiboko* squad, thus more towards regime functionaries. Although Crime Preventers were given police training, they were not given arms, probably not to raise much public concern. Subsequently, Crime Preventers subsumed the LDUs and vigilantes, thus became the most dominant quasi community/state grassroots security apparatus, especially in the low-income areas (interviews with Security Personnel, 3–15 August 2016, Kampala). Fig 2 below shows the changed structure of the community-security system from 2016 to-date.

Fig. 2: The typology of the new community-security system in Kampala



Source: Author’s construction based on field findings

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From Fig 2 shows, it is noteworthy that another tier of Crime Preventers was introduced between the LC system and the police. The Crime Preventers were pseudo-formal, thus further away from LCs than the dismantled community-based LDUs. Crime Preventers were more inclined towards the state as they were given Police Training; worked more with the Police, and received resources like uniforms, boots, batons, handcuffs and food unlike the community-based LDUs.

#### **Controversy over the symbiosis of state versus community initiatives**

With regard to the change from LDUs to Crime Preventers, the state co-opted and usurped a community-based security mechanism. Crime Preventers became more of a state security apparatus than the LDUs who were a purely voluntary community force. There were concerns that Crime Preventers were conceived to serve political rather than community security concerns. This presents a scenario where the state seemed to perfect a community-based security mechanism to serve narrow security and its political interests of sustaining the NRM regime. It was observed that the boundaries between the state and community initiative with regard to Crime Preventers were blurred as the state tended to use them as its grassroots "security force". From this context, the regime hijacked a community based security mechanism to serve its narrow political interests of "bringing order", cum security, by suppressing riotous opponents. In this regard, the Chief Executive Officer of Human Rights Network Uganda, is quoted thus: "Crime preventers work in a grey area between the state and civilians, allowing them to operate with impunity and without oversight or clear command structure" (Ndifuna Muhammad, in Human Rights Watch, 12 January, 2016). This projected the Crime Preventers as an extension of the grassroots state security apparatus, thus became contentious especially among the political opposition. The Inspector General of Police (IGP) succinctly informs us thus:

They (Crime Preventers) are organised right from national level, district and sub-county up to the village and under the management of the police. And we are trying to link it up to the LC system and *mayumba kumi*. We want to revive the *mayumba kumi*.... What is more important is; this is a program of the police. Nobody should confuse it. We have a Department of Community Policing which is headed by Commissioner Namutebi who reports to Chief Political Commissar of Police, so it is not just a group that is there (Keihura, 2016).

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Crime Preventers were, therefore, instituted as a security organ under the Police. Additionally, Crime Preventers expected more formal benefits from the state compared to LDUs who were more voluntary-oriented and community rewarded. Interviews with Crime Preventers unearthed high expectations regarding opportunities and rewards after the 2016 general elections, which was contrary to the voluntarism of the community-based LDUs. In his address to Crime Preventers, General Kale Keihura assured Crime Preventers of the opportunities thus:

To crime preventers, you are not doing things out of charity.... We can't give you salary because you are in millions. Right now we have got 11 million Crime Preventers throughout the country. The Police are only 43,000... We can't pay you salary but you are going to get projects. This is real, so that as you serve, you have projects which can bring income to you at the same time you are liberating the country (Keihura, 2016).

Human Rights Watch noted that although Crime Preventers did not receive a formal government salary, many of them believed that they would have preferential access to government jobs, financial or material compensation for their work. It was reported that many Crime Preventer were hopeful that they would be employed with the Uganda Police, Prison Services or Army after the elections (Human Rights Watch, 12 January 2016).

The opposition considered the state to have usurped and co-opted a community security system and diverted it towards cracking down on the activities of the opposition. In this vein, Crime Preventers also displayed attributes of the ruling NRM party vigilantes. Crime Preventers were often on the forefront of cracking down on opposition activities under the guise of the provisions stipulated under the Public Order Management Law. For instance, a Crime Preventer in Fort-Portal town is quoted as telling the Human Rights Watch that: "The commander told me that I should fight hard against other parties. We are living in the ruling NRM era, so other parties don't need to surface" (Human Rights Watch, 12 January, 2016).

Accordingly, debate emerged regarding the legality, legal statute, mandate and command structure of the Crime Preventer's "force". Conversely, the government, especially the IGP argued that Crime Preventers are: "a legitimate programme, it is constitutional, lawful, empowering and improving the strength of the country" (Keihura, 2016). The IGP legitimised

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the creation of the Crime Preventers as provided for by the Police Act which allowed recruitment of civilians as a supplementary force. The IGP drew attention to earlier recruitments of civilian forces during insurgency, for instance the “Amuka boys” in the Northern Region and the “Arrow boys” in the Teso region.

#### **Community Security Organisation, Initiatives, Technologies and Resources**

The different low-income communities in Kampala city were organised under structures that enabled them to ensure security and support systems. Community organisations were of diverse nature; formal, informal or spontaneously emerging in-situ. Leaders of the community organisations were either elected by the membership or evolved through traditional processes. Accordingly, community-led systems were legitimate, relevant and effective in ensuring security and support for the communities. Community arrangements like the LCs evolved as community domestication of a state initiative. Community security initiatives augmented the state security systems, and in some cases run parallel leading to occasional conflictual relations with the conventional mechanisms. For our low-income residents of Yowana Maria Muzeei and Kifumbira, community initiatives ensured security, protection and support for the well-being of the communities. Table 1 summarises the typology of community security arrangements.

**Table 1: Typology of Community Security Initiatives**

<b>Communities</b>	<b>Precipitating factors for the initiative</b>	<b>Affected Spots</b>	<b>Established initiatives</b>	<b>Effectiveness</b>
Residential Groups (Yowana Maria Muzeei and Kifumbira)	Inadequate state security due to weakness, failure and inefficiencies. Increase of unemployment and crime from idlers, strangers, drug abusers.	Guest-Houses, isolated dark spots, abandoned /incomplete construction sites, night clubs and slums.	LDUs, vigilantes, Patrols, Resident Identification Cards (IDs), Village Security Committees Identification of	Very Effective

	Major crimes were murders, rapes, thefts and robberies.		dangerous spots and criminal elements in the community	
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**Mengo Parish, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone**

Yowana Maria Mzeei is in Mengo, which is one of the twenty parishes of Kampala Central Urban Council. Mengo borders with Old Kampala Parish to the North and Lubaga Division Urban Council to the West. Mengo is the location of the Main Palace of the King of Buganda, and the word Mengo in Luganda means grinding stones<sup>1</sup>. Yowana Maria Mzeei is one of the many villages (zones) in Mengo Parish which is of particular significance as it skirts around the historical site where one of the Uganda Martyrs, St. Yowana Maria Mzeei was killed during the reign of King (*Kabaka*) Mwanga<sup>2</sup>.

The study purposively sampled Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone as it is a congested low-income slum area, with significant security related issues (Interview, Local Council (LC) Chairman and FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala, see appendices). According to the respondents, Yowana Maria Mzeei village was once a bastion of insecurity, because of its central location in Rubaga and Kampala Central Divisions which are heavily populated by low income and unemployed youths. As a result, Yowana Maria Mzeei was abundant with thieves, petty robbers, drug users and other criminals who found the village a convenient safe passage and convergence point for execution of their activities.

***Yowana Maria Mzeei Community Security Mentalities***

In Yowana Maria Mzeei, there were concerns of thieves and robbers whom the community suspected of being well-connected to the regular state police for protection and to big “patrons” in town who bought the loot. Widespread unemployment especially among the youth was cited as the major factor in fuelling crime like theft and robberies. Many unemployed youths in the area engaged in deviant behaviours like taking drugs and stealing, hence causing insecurity.

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FGD participants also attributed insecurity in Yowana Maria Muzeei and Uganda as a whole to the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries like Somalia, Congo and Rwanda who were unregulated yet came without proper documents. Respondents and FGD participants called for government regulation and imposition of strict laws to limit the number of refugees entering the country. FGD participants alleged that some of the refugees were criminals who posed a threat to the security of the area (FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala).

#### *Yowana Maria Muzeei Community Organisational structures*

Residents in Yowana Maria Muzeei zone were organised under their LC 1 Chairperson, who had stayed in leadership for long thus doubled as a community elder. While the LC system was a formal community administrative structure, in Yowana Maria Muzeei, it was fused with the informal community arrangements. For instance, the LC Chairperson drew a lot of advice from prominent elders in his area of jurisdiction, with whom they constituted a quasi-formal structure for dispensing leadership. The Chairperson identified the elders on the basis of qualities like prominence, eminence, experience, trustworthiness, wisdom and reputation. These elders performed *pro-bono* advisory roles on a wide range of issues like crime prevention and conflict resolutions, notably domestic violence. The Chairperson and community leaders were also consulted on any initiatives to be undertaken in the area either by Civil Society or government agencies. This community arrangement often worked in partnerships with state security agencies like the police.

#### *Yowana Maria Muzeei Community Security Organisation*

Yowana Maria Muzeei area had rampant thefts and robberies, yet the state law enforcers were inefficient. FGD participants harped on the inefficiencies of state security agencies, and noted that security officers made arm-chair plans from above with hardly any concrete knowledge of what obtained on the ground. Participants gave an example of the Criminal Investigating Department (CID) officials and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) whom they accused of staying in their offices hence out of touch with the realities on ground (FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala). FGD participants attributed the police inefficiency to poor remuneration, understaffing and low motivation. Participants maintained that a police station could be staffed by not more than two armed police personnel, thus could patrol for a short time yet thieves often came late in the night (FGD, Yowana Maria Muzeei, 4 August 2016). FGD

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participants also insinuated to possibilities of collusion between some errant police personnel and criminals, which they justified by citing the frequent release of suspects. The relationship between Yowana Maria Muzeei residents and the police was, therefore, characterised by low confidence and suspicions. Residents suspected the police to be accomplices and part of the dubious rackets of some crime perpetrators. Residents believed that the police was vulnerable to allures from criminals due to its high propensity towards corruption. FGD participants substantiated thus:

We would give police information in confidence about suspects and they would instead divulge the informer, thus endangering our lives. The police take a lot of bribes from suspects, hence often released most of them. We take suspects caught red-handed with exhibits, but before we reach home, the suspects are already released! Such a case was when the son of (names withheld) was shot by thieves in Kisenyi and we were told that a policeman helped the suspects to escape arrest! Once we arrested a young man with guns and military uniform and handed him to the police, but before we arrived home, he came following us. We later learnt that the suspect had bribed and secured his release (FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala).

Subsequently, the residents often circumvented the police and made their own security arrangements made up of two categories, namely, Crime Preventers (2 trained Crime Preventers) and a security committee where members worked on voluntary basis. The security committee was led by the LC Chairman and had a composition of other members including elders. It was only when the community failed to resolve cases that they referred them to the police.

FGD participants explained that they organised their own "*court mbagirawo*" (express court) and mobilised their own "force" in collaboration with the LC rather than police. They organised night patrols, developed their own signals like whistles to alert each other. Participants praised their system as very effective because thefts and robberies drastically reduced and claimed that the area was now very peaceful. Participants noted that the effectiveness of their initiatives was because they were the ones who knew where the thieves and the idlers stayed and they were the ones who knew the Somali refugees who come without documents. Participants further enlightened thus: "In the case of domestic disputes, we first refer them to the LCs and elders for

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resolution and only refer them to courts after failing. We know and trust the opinion leaders and elders on the basis of their experience and respectability” (FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala).

One challenge faced by members on the Security Committee and Crime Preventers was that some of the notorious youths were of known residents, which complicated their arrest and prosecution. Such strained community relations, especially when the police revealed that the community security personnel were pursuing the case. As the Security Committee and Crime Preventers were part of the community, they faced challenges of constrained social relations in arresting suspects from well-known background.

The second challenge faced by the Security Committee and Crime Preventers was lack of resources for effective operations. The Security Committee and Crime Preventers said that they did not get resources and support from the state, which was a major handicap for their operations. The community Security Committee and Crime Preventers construed the state as not recognising and appreciating their efforts. The police occasionally gave Crime Preventers some money which was insufficient for their operations. What was surprising to the Community Security Committee and Crime Preventers was that in many cases, the police asked them to provide funds, for instance, to fuel vehicles for operations. Accordingly, FGD participants appealed for financial support, facilitation and motivation to enable them carry out their duties of maintaining security (FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala).

#### *Yowana Maria Muzeei Community Relations with State Security Agencies*

Community security initiatives sometimes conflicted with the state agencies on several issues. First, the police blamed the community’s express courts (court *mbagirawo*), which, for instance, administered corporal punishment of 100 strokes to suspects caught red-handed. According to the community security committees, this became an effective deterrence that engendered security in the area. However, the police and formal civil courts operated on the maxim of presumption of innocence and the inalienable right of suspects to be heard. Secondly, in other cases of well-known offenders, community systems preferred restorative justice rather than the conventional formal prosecution. Thirdly, as earlier noted, divulging informers by the police endangered the safety of crime preventers and strained social relations as they were part and parcel of the community. As a result, Crime Preventers



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were beginning to avoid alerting the police, with ramifications of inefficiency in security governance.

Other relational constraint between the state and community-based nodes emanated from contradictory policy trajectories. The community's village security committee often passed bylaws to ensure security. Such were, for instance, operational time frames for night clubs, discos and parties. However, respondents pointed out that some operators and organisers often disregarded community bylaws and instead went to the police and got clearance to operate beyond the time schedules stipulated by the village bylaws. Subsequently, such activities ended-up providing cover for wrong elements to indulge in crime. This lack of cooperation between the police and the local community security teams thwarted security arrangements in the area. With clearance from the police, operators denigrated community security arrangements. Accordingly, respondents underlined the need to empower the community and the LC in security governance as they were more conversant with the realities of their areas and potential criminals (FGD participants, 4 August 2016, Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone, Mengo, Kampala). The trajectory of preponderance of community over state agencies suggested that it was not only the state which regulated the community agencies, but non-state nodes could also engage and regulate state agencies (Scott, 2001).

**Kifumbira - Kawempe Division**

Kifumbira 11 Zone stretches between the North Eastern boundaries of Kampala Central Division Urban Council in Kamwokya II Parish and the Eastern areas of Kawempe Division Urban Council in Kyebando Parish. Kifumbira is populated by different ethnic groups, especially the Batooro, Banyankole, Baganda and Bafumbira who are the dominant ethnicity. Kifumbira is a marginal low-cost area and its neighbourhood is a densely congested slum, with poorly constructed and unplanned housing units; poor drainage and rudimentary sanitary infrastructure. Kifumbira was, therefore, a suitable sample for the study. Two FGDs and in-depth interviews were held with the Kifumbira community and leaders (FGD participants, 15 August 2016, Kifumbira, Kamwokya, Kampala, see appendices).

***Kifumbira Community Security Mentalities and Concerns***

FGD participants cited the concern of some law-breakers from Kisoro in South Western Uganda escaping and infiltrating Kifumbira where they hide. Such were a security threat, as some were hit-men who used weighing scale stones, iron bars and machetes to attack and rob residents. Most attacks took

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place in shack drinking joints and narrow alleyways that criss-cross the Kifumbira slum. These hit-men also targeted people returning from work late at night (FGD participants, 15 August 2016, Kifumbira, Kamwokya, Kampala).

#### *Kifumbira Organisational Structures*

The community in Kifumbira was organised along the LC formal structure, under a Chairperson. In addition, Kifumbira residents recognised community/opinion leaders who constituted an informal system. The community/opinion leaders dispensed roles of uniting, advising, guiding the community, intervening in the resolution of internal and domestic disputes, oversaw the protection or rescuing of members who got into trouble. The community/opinion leaders gained legitimacy as trustworthy old men and women (*nabakyala*), to whom the Kifumbira women folk refer their complaints. This community also has a security structure led by the LC 1 Chairperson with support from members of the village security committee which was elected basing on qualities of being faithful, knowledgeable and trustworthy. The people in Kifumbira also formed different Associations like “*ebyarufu*” and “*omuryango*” which were social support systems. Some of the associations were credit and savings Associations, where members saved UGX 1,000 daily and on the 96<sup>th</sup> day they all share the money. Members also contribute for community support causes like crises. These groups gave the Kifumbira community collective power against insecurity threats and crises.

#### *Kifumbira Community Security Initiatives and Technologies*

FGD participants and principal respondents informed us that the police sometimes carried out patrols to enforce security in Kifumbira. However, respondents reiterated the weakness of the police in providing effective security. Participants noted that police patrols were delimited to the main roads; carried out before midnight and simply made random arrests of those on the road, including innocent passers-by. The participants pointed out that criminals instead operated in deep inner-slam narrow alleyways of the congested Kifumbira, shack drinking joints and after midnight. Participants maintained that they were better versed with the security intricacies within their community, hence the state agencies should entrust them with maintaining their own security (FGD participants, 15 August 2016, Kifumbira, Kamwokya, Kampala).

Accordingly, the Kifumbira community undertook their own initiatives to bolster the police. These included establishing their own Security

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Committees of 14 persons each, night patrols, use of cell-phone communication, instituting Identity Cards (IDs) and bylaws. The Security Committees were informal community security organisations under the LCs. With the coming of the Crime Preventers, the community Security Committees were reinforced as the Crime Preventers became part of the Security Committees. The quasi formal Crime Preventers brought valuable advantage, as they had received some training thus able to guide the other Security Committee team members on how to handle different situations which were encountered during the patrols. The Crime Preventers also had contacts with the police, so in cases where the patrolling team needed back-up from police, this was obtained through the contacts of the Crime Preventers. According to the FGD participants, the Kifumbira patrol team had managed to make many arrests and as a result security had greatly improved in the area. Most of the arrested were people found living in Kifumbira with no identification. These were interrogated and taken to the police for screening.

Apart from the Identification Cards, the Kifumbira community also enacted bylaws like closing drinking joints by mid-night otherwise they drink from in-doors. This enabled those who patrol to easily intercept and question those who move late in the night. The patrolling Security Committees would also administer their own express punishments in case the arrested person failed to identify him/herself. Such punishments included whipping after which the arrested person was taken to the police. FGD participants opined that their initiatives were very effective in maintaining security in Kifumbira. The Kifumbira Community security team was, however, handicapped by lack of resources and equipment. Such included torches, rain coats and gum boots, which were particularly needed during rainy seasons (FGD participants, 15 August 2016, Kifumbira, Kamwokya, Kampala).

*Kifumbira Community Security Confounding Factors*

Although Kifumbira was populated by various ethnic groups, identity trajectories along the different ethnic contours were reflected in their security initiatives. For instance, when the predominantly Bafumbira (ethnicity) conducted patrols and arrested a Mufumbira kith and kin, friendly restorative approaches were applied. The Bafumbira elders would, for instance, intervene to counsel the arrested person against committing crimes. It was when friendly approaches failed that they handed over the suspect to the police. Such friendly treatment was not guaranteed when the arrested person was a stranger. Such strands pointed to undercurrents of kith and kin

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protective bonds that interlaced the general Kifumbira community security initiatives. The FGD participants said that if a fellow good Mufumbira got into trouble, they naturally had to intervene to find out the nature of the problem and render whatever assistance or security to the person. The Kifumbira community leader explained thus: “Most Bafumbira work in town, particularly around the Taxi and Bus Parks as hawkers. They mainly get embroiled with Kampala City Council Authority (KCCA) agents. They closely monitor each other and have each other’s contacts, so when one of them gets a problem say in case of arrest, they quickly alert each other and Bafumbira leaders who then come to police to bail-out or rescue the arrested” (Interview, Nsenga Vincent, Chairperson Kifumbira, 16 August 2016, Kifumbira, Kamwokya, Kampala)

#### *Kifumbira Community Relations with State Security Agencies*

FGD participants and principle respondents observed that the police were not effective in maintaining security due to the internal complexities of Kifumbira settlements. Respondents insisted that they knew better the dynamics of Kifumbira better than the police. As a result, the police recognised the community security initiatives which were complimentary to the police. FGD participants also reiterated the corrupt tendencies among the police, which they considered to abate insecurity in their area. For instance, respondents said that whenever the community handed-over suspected criminals to the police, these were released within few days without being charged (FGD participants, 15 August 2016, Kifumbira, Kamwokya, Kampala; (Interviews, Principal Respondents, 3-15 August 2016, Kampala).

#### **Conclusion**

This paper explored the alternative community-based security nodes in low income urban communities like Kifumbira and Yowana Maria Muzeei in Kampala. The paper noted that community security mechanisms were traditional, but traced contemporary initiatives within the context of high insecurity that followed the overthrow of the Idi Amin regime. Community initiatives rose to fill the lacunae of the conventional state mechanisms that were characterised by gross deficiencies, inefficiencies and corruption. Uganda’s long history of political turmoil that led to criminal gangs, and factors like unemployment fuelled insecurity against the backdrop of institutional degeneration and weakness of the Uganda state security systems. However, owing to the sensitivity of security and state interests, the state retained overall responsibility hence community nodes operated within the ambit of state security agencies. The paper noted that while the affluent

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sections of society afforded private security arrangements, low-income communities organised themselves and conceived initiatives on how to maintain security among their communities.

While the state initiated community systems like *Mayumba -Kumi* and LCs, the communities domesticated and perfected the state initiatives leading to evolution of formidable community security initiatives like LDUs. Community security arrangements were of diverse arrangements, ranging from formal to informal, and spontaneous collective arrangements and often aligned along the traditional community systems, which placed them in the grey area of “boundary institutions”. The communities also started their own initiatives, for instance, resident Identity Cards which grew into the state’s idea and subsequent institution of national Identity Cards. The project established that the diverse community security nodes were largely legitimate, effectiveness and effective in complementing the public police in the maintenance of security in communities.

The study noted the need to increase the effectiveness of the alternative community initiatives to be able to augment the state and private nodes in the governance of security. First, there was need for capacity building to enable community security enforcers to engage the increasingly sophisticated crime perpetrators. Such would be enhanced through trainings in basic military skills, handling of suspects and evidence gathering which would increase the capacity of the community security enforcers. Secondly, although voluntarism was the overriding principle, there was need for basic facilitation, incentives and equipment of the community security enforcement agents. These would range from basic equipment like boots, communication apparatus and costs (air-time) or even a rifle and sniffer dogs. These community security vigilantes were usually the first at the scenes of crime, hence the need for facilitation and equipment to handle and record complex situations.

**Notes**

1. The etymology of Mengo (grinding stones) is from a narrative to the effect that the area was full of grinding stones which were particularly put to use by migrants from Ssesse Islands who had a lot of cereal.

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2. Kabaka (King) Mwanga sought to re-assert his authority and the traditional establishment against the threat of the in-coming colonial order by suppressing new institutions like Christianity. One of the converts was Yowana Maria Mzeei who was beaten and as he bled profusely, he crawled to a nearby well to quench his thirst but later died. This well is now a shrine where pilgrims annually flock, and the surrounding area became known as Yowana Maria Mzeei Zone.

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