

Participation of Minorities in Policing: Community Policing as a Good Practice

Why should minorities participate in policing?

Participation of minorities in various areas of life is essential for the development of a truly inclusive society. It is through effective participation that a person belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities expresses and protects her or his identity.

Police agencies are usually composed of officials who represent the dominant community in society. In many countries women and in particular minority women enjoy only limited access to participation in the police service.

Homogeneity in the composition of the police often results in biased behaviour towards minorities. In some countries the police functions as protectors of the state or of the ruling political elite rather than as servants of the community at large. Restrictions imposed on the participation of minorities in society can lead to isolation and to confrontational rather than cooperative relations between police and minorities. This pressure can serve to increase inter-communal tensions which in turn can lead to conflict.

Measures required to improve participation of minorities in social, cultural and political life are to take into account the historical, cultural and religious contexts of a given country. Notwithstanding distinctions in circumstances, certain practices or initiatives that work in a given context may be drawn upon in another and prove to be effective.

Experiences demonstrate that minority representation in the police leads to much more efficient police work.

Participation of minorities in policing: how?

Overrepresentation of minorities as victims and defendants in the criminal justice system can be overcome by removing obstacles to their participation in the administration of justice.

In order to improve participation of minorities in the administration of justice including law enforcement structures such as the police, OHCHR launched a

“Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life”

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities, art.2

series of consultations on good/effective practices in policing and minority communities with the view to collect experiences that work and could be replicated to benefit participation and representation. OHCHR collected practices that: (i) work in particular circumstances; (ii) result in better protection of minorities; (iii) and enhance the work of the police.

The consultations demonstrated that a strategy in policing that is inclusive of minorities should be part of an overall governmental policy relating to the protection of minority rights. An ‘isolated’ approach towards policing and minorities will likely be ineffective, in light of conflicting minority-related policies in other areas.

Therefore, coherent and comprehensive minority policies require meaningful consultation designed to address the particular needs and circumstances of minorities, as well as their full and equal access to the police services.

After all, modern, good practice models of policing are all based on a service-oriented approach which requires communication and consultation with all groups in society, including minorities. In this regard, it is of paramount importance that police agencies reach out to minority communities in order to build trust.

Participation of minorities in policing in their own communities

The concept of ‘Community Policing’ or ‘policing with the community’ or ‘proximity policing’ can be interpreted in many different ways, ranging from organizing non-committal football matches between police and citizens to highly sophisticated forms of full partnership between the police and local communities.

Community Policing can be a highly useful tool in addressing 'root causes' of criminality within the community and improve relations between law enforcement and minority communities.

In practice Community Policing is a challenge both for the police and the community: for the police because Community Policing offers a say to the community about the way they want to be policed; a challenge for the community, as combatting crime and maintaining public order and security are tasks of a police service and not that of ordinary citizens. Community Policing includes at least two main components: (i) an intensive partnership established with the intent to create and build relationships between police and communities by sharing joint responsibility for public safety and security; and (ii) a problem-solving approach which includes for instance effort to identify and address the underlying causes for the commission of certain crimes.

By addressing 'root causes' of criminality within the community, the police becomes more effective in crime prevention.

Community Policing: good practices

Community policing must be publicly and strongly supported by the national political and police leadership, in addition to benefiting support from the minority community.

Involvement of Community Police officers recruited from minority communities are often more trusted in such communities than the 'regular' police particularly when they are properly trained and unarmed.

Good practices include community police officers holding regular public discussions in minority communities to facilitate the communication of complaints. Feedback is to be provided as to steps undertaken to address complaints including justification when grievances are not addressed effectively.

It is important that minority women are able to be actively involved in police-community partnerships. Mixed-patrol teams including women from the minority community concerned who speak the minority language are crucial.

Regular rotation of officers is important in order to avoid corruption or to counter the consequences of strong community relations which could affect the impartiality of individual officers from minority communities.

Normative standards and further reading

- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\), \(Articles 27 and 25\)](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\) \(Article 30\)](#)
- [Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities \(1992\)](#)
- [Commentary to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities of the Working Group on Minorities, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2](#)
- [Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 18 \(Non-discrimination\), 1989](#)
- [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action \(2002\) para 72 \(Programme of Action\)](#)
- [Recommendations of the second session of the Forum on Minority Issues on minorities and effective political participation, A/HRC/13/25](#)
- [Work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Human Rights bodies with regard to minorities and the right to effective participation, Note by the Secretariat A/HRC/FMI/2009/5](#)
- [UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, "Administration of Justice, Rule of Law and Democracy: Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System, Paper by Leila Zerrougui, Special Rapporteur appointed to conduct a detailed study of discrimination in the criminal justice system in implementation of Sub-Commission Resolution 2002/3," June 26, 2003, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2003/3.](#)
- [Human Rights and Law Enforcement, A Manual on Human Rights Training for the Police \(OHCHR, Professional Training Series No.5](#)
- [Human Rights Standards and Practice for the Police, Expanded Pocket Book on Human Rights for the Police \(OHCHR, Professional Training Series No.5/Add 3\)](#)