**Community Policing in Jamaica**

**Purpose;**

The purpose of this document is to help understand the current and potential future approach of Community Policing within the Jamaican context.

It is however an interim report and subject to change pending further information being made available.

**Introduction;**

From the 2nd of June to 6th of June 2014 an assessment mission was undertaken by UNDP and DPKO staff to assess the future program potential for a program for Social Cohesion within Jamaican. There has been some discussion around supporting the Jamaican Constabulary Force (JCF) in the area of Community Policing (CP). What could be problematic in such an approach is for external actors to understand the nature and approach currently being adopted by the JFC in their implementation of Community Policing. By gaining some understanding of the history and interpretation of CP both internally and externally to Jamaican may assist in both program design and subsequent implementation for the current and future context.

**Community Policing defined or not defined;**

In general CP is accepted as a strategy or philosophy of policing that is encompassed in two broad principles that being;

1. For Police to establish and maintain the trust of the community,
2. To work with the community in partnership in resolving issues that affect the community.

While both principals appear quite simplistic there is often fundamental differences for interpretation and the subsequent implementation of CP.

CP itself is also a concept that has originated from the West whose police services when formed were often mandated for the protection of civilians while often being remove from politics. It should be recalled that many colonial police services in formation were not so lofty in their ideals but were often formed or expanded to suppress local insurgency or rebellion that rose through the marginalisation caused by imperialization and colonialism. The JFC is one such service. Such models of colonial policing that have been referred to as the Ulster model were often structured to be armed and quasi military in aspect that focused mainly on State security. Positive engagement often resulted as interface between ‘front line officers’ rather than structural organisational arrangements. In the last several decades as many countries were decolonised and having to adapt to new forms of governance and independence were unable to undertake modernisation as rapidly as the West as previous governance structures had been set up as being dependant to the original colonising countries. However in the last 30 or so years external imposed changes mostly due to globalisation has caused in country events such as urban drift and rising crime to cope has meant that the JCF was meant to adjust and adapt far more rapidly than a Western Police service that has the processes, support and time to be seen as the more modern proactive Police service.

This has meant that police services such as the JFC are then often viewed with a critical eye as being unable to undertake the challenges of mainstreaming or operationalising CP throughout the organisation. This is mainly because they are seen to have some of the following characteristics

* Aligned to military style services both in organisation and appearance,
* Little or no operational decision making by lower ranks,
* Retention of a provision of security mentality tending to be reactive in nature,
* Compartmentalisation of organisational groups

The Constabulary Force Act makes specific reference to the service as being partially under Military organisation and discipline.

To implement or mainstream CP is rendered even more problematic in that there is a lexicon of language around CP originating from those CP two principals. If that language is used then is examined can be subject to a range of interpretations such as;

* Community Policing: Where Police recognise the need to provide policing to a number of people usually defined by geography, although this can take into account other group characteristics such as race, religion, gender or sexual orientation to name a few.
* Community based Policing: Usually refers to where Police are located within the community usually through physical placement such as Police posts, stations or even check points. Often can be used in conjunction with decentralisation.
* Community oriented Policing: Police are aware of the needs of a community to be policed in such a way that recognises those needs and attempts to police to those needs while meeting other operational priorities.
* Problem solving Policing: The approach often adopted by Police officers that uses information gathered from communities and other sources with regards to crimes, persons of interest and even resources (can be people or organisations) to eliminate or mitigate issues within a community. Often this can be associated to Intelligence led Police that is based more at a Police organisational level around the deployment of staff and resources to deal with operational outputs.

These definitions are themselves are quite broad and based on a person or organisations experience and perspective can mean those interpretations can overlap creating differing meaning.

**The Jamaica Policing Context**

For the JCF policing is polarised due to a high incidence of Police related shootings where the JCF have been criticised as acting with impunity that also includes allegations of corruption. There is however a large number of shootings against Police in a society that has ready access to firearms. This becomes problematic for implementing and mainstreaming CP throughout the organisation for two reasons;

1. With such a large number of Police related shootings and allegations of corruption it is difficult for Jamaican society at large to establish and maintain trust with the Police
2. With the high crime rate and attacks on Police it becomes difficult for the Police to adopt a non-defensive posture with communities that they interact with, particularly those communities with a high number of attacks on police.

**Operationalising Community Policing within the JCF**

For some Police services the organisation structure and functions are a legislative Act that means any change can be difficult as it has to pass through the legislative bodies of the state. However for the JCF under the Constabulary Force Act the organisational structure and functions of the JCF shall be decided between the office of the Commissioner of the JCF and the Minister responsible for the JCF. This makes any change or function easier to implement.

Under the current organisational chart (refer annex A) the area of Community Policing can be found under the Community Safety and Security Portfolio. This comprises of several portfolios consisting of

* Community relations
* Neighbourhood watch
* Community partnerships
* Tourism and visitor security
* Youth club and school brigade

Previously the activities by the above group for community policing could at first glance be construed as nothing more than a public relations exercise. This is often a source of criticism around the adoption of CP where it is nothing more than a ‘feel good’ exercise that provides a veneer of good practice while failing to deal with the real underlying issues at a macro level. However in a number of interviews conducted by the assessment team what became readily apparent was members of various community groups who informed the team that in particular the ‘Youth clubs’ run and paid for by the JFC was the only source of support for youth particularly in marginalised communities.

Under the current regime the adopted approach that is to be rolled out the JCF have decided to undertake what they have determined as “Proximity Policing” as a way to operationalise Community Policing. This will be undertaken by

* The establishment of police posts in vulnerable and volatile communities
* The establishment of dedicated foot patrols and static presence.
* The deploying of small community patrol teams on bikes to put patrols in easy reach of citizens.
* An emphasis on police visibility to boost citizen confidence.

Tasking’s for officers undertaking those roles will be to;

* Protect citizens in communities.
* Protect their rights and safeguard freedom.
* Protect their property and investments.
* Ensure they enjoy public spaces and facilities.
* Organize community meetings.
* Look out for signs of crimes.
* Prevent crimes and disorder.
* Provide advice and safety tips.
* Gather intelligence.
* Build relationship with citizens

An opportunity was presented to the team on the last day of the assessment to visit and observe JFC CP practice based on the new JCP approach to operationalising CP. A visit was paid to the Fletcher's Land Police Station that is found in the lower socio economic area of Kingston. The station itself was a relatively small two storey complex that was in a run-down state. It comprised of a number of small rooms that provided barrack space for some officers and work areas for others that had a watch house (reception) area as well as an interview area plus some offices for the station commander and investigative staff. The station commander advised recently two Detectives were transferred to the station to improve the level of response for more serious crimes as well as guidance for frontline officers in case preparation. The station Commander indicated the biggest Policing issue within the area was the various warring/gang type factions that existed within his streets. It was as he said a few individuals who made the remainder of the community’s lives intolerable. Also present at the station were 3 members of the mobile response team. These officers were heavily armed and kitted out in body armour in the style found in the picture below.



### The Station Commander also offered to either drive us around the area of operations or to ‘walk the ground’. The later was chosen. The station commander his 2 I/C accompanied and a member of the CP team walked with the assessment team members. What was apparently obvious during the walk was the ‘siege type structures’ such as high walls with no outward facing windows that were exacerbated by the narrow streets found within the area. Such structures while being protective in nature however also heighten anxiety and fear responses to individuals living in and visiting the area. During the beat walk the assessment team was able to view the Police interacting with local community members. Opportunity was also taken during this walk to interview the station commander with regards to his knowledge of CP practice and understanding of the surrounding area. At one stage met coming in the opposite direction were the three officers from the mobile response team marching in single file. However the station commander was a pains to both introduce and encourage persons encountered to be honest with their views about citizen security and the JCF Police response of which a number were. This itself a first glance seem unusual when comparison was made between the heavily armed unit that was to act as a deterrent effect when compared to the easy going interaction between the station commander his officers and the local citizenry. In summary the following was noted;

### The station Commander and his officers had very good local knowledge of their surrounding area with regards to crime statistics, citizen movements, demographics, and needs of the community within the station area,

### The station Commander and his officers have obviously received training and understand the underlying principles of CP and problem solving tools associated to CP training.

### Interactions with the community members of which there was a range in both gender, age and social standing indicated an appreciation for the Police presence plus an understanding of the high threat situations that the JCF had to undertake on a daily basis- this also included the use of the mobile response team.

### Initial conclusion

### Without further information based on interviews and observations it would appear that the JCFs operationalising of CP is appropriate for the context. If examined the JCF by providing officers to be based within Communities to enable quicker and more effective response’s to incidents and by taking an overt high visibility as a position to the high threat crime incidents is step to establishing the trust of a community as this equates to service delivery. While this could be also done through a centralised process the JCP by adopting a decentralised approach have recognised the need to keep in touch with the community and respond more quickly to crime.

### However what possibly is happening is that the JCP see CP as a tool to managing a situation when in fact it is should merely be a part of normal duties. This moves away from the need to have to assume total responsibility for any resulting given areas/communities law and order issues to seeing themselves as part of the community that ‘collectively’ resolves issues. This is more in sync with the concept of ‘social cohesion’.

### What the role that the JCP will play in working on issue re-solution within the community the second part to CP will for communities be very much context driven particularly for long term solutions. But broadly here the JCP should learn to play a partnership, supporting coordinating role while ensuring that issues are ‘owned’ by the communities themselves so that communities can;

### Identify their own problems

### Suggest solutions

### Provide some resources

### Re-evaluate and reassess their needs

### As many issues usually arise through socio economic factors what the JCF can and cannot do and take responsibility for should be clearly understood both within and outside of the organisation. Appropriate actions when unable to take on issues as aligned to responsibilities also form a part of the broader CP skill set and is often not considered but also forms an integral part of service delivery for any organisation.

### Kevin Brennan 19/6/2014

### Police Planning Officer DPKO Police Division