

Who is the Community in Community-Oriented Policing (COP) Training?

Ingrid Nyborg

International police advisors and national police educators and trainers provide specialized courses in COP, where they emphasize the importance of developing good, trust-based relations between the police and communities in post-conflict contexts. But how well do they reflect a common underlying understanding of some of the most basic concepts of COP? This brief presents some of our findings on how police training and training materials address key concepts in COP such as community, gender and partnerships, and the implications this has on the way COP is taught, understood and practiced.

INTRODUCTION

Community-oriented policing (COP) has over the last decade become an important component of post-conflict police reform processes. Common to most COP trainings is an emphasis on the importance of developing good, trust-based relations between the police and communities and the building of partnerships. Despite this, women and other vulnerable groups at the local level are consistently marginalized or left out of COP activities in practice. Why is this so? Is there a problem with the way in which police understand communities? Policy on COP stresses the importance of working with communities, being attentive to gender aspects, and forming partnerships. There are, however, different ways to conceptualize each of these concepts that, in turn, can result in very different approaches to training and practice. There is also a lack of attention to how these three aspects of COP might be related. To better understand this, we studied a sample of 20 COP training documents from a variety of post-conflict contexts to see how community was addressed, and how it might be linked to other key COP concepts such as gender and partnerships¹.

COP IN POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS

While the concept of community-oriented policing has been around since at least the 1990s, in-

terest in its relevance in post-conflict contexts is a more recent phenomenon. The term appeared in the UN Security Council Resolution 2185 in 2014, and in the DPKO-DFS Policy on Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions in 2015, and in 2018 they published a new edition of their Manual for Community-Oriented Policing in United Nations Peace Operations. The EU has also become active in promoting COP, and in 2019 the EUCPN published a policy paper for member states 'Policy on Community-Oriented Policing in the European Union', where they chart out six pillars of COP in Europe.

In our ICT4COP research on 12 post-conflict contexts, we have also developed key recommendations that together form a conceptual approach to COP. These echo some of the aspects of the UN and EU policy documents, but accentuate aspects that we have found to be critical when implementing police reforms in these particularly challenging contexts²:

- Know the context.
- Promote ownership of COP among a variety of government and local actors through participatory processes.
- Apply a broad notion of security (and insecurity).

- Promote police practices that build mutual trust, legitimacy in the eyes of communities, and downward accountability.
- Recognize the existence of multiple security providers.
- Pay particular attention to vulnerable groups.
- Include trust-building elements in ICT development and focus on inclusive technology.

Despite some similarities with existing understandings of COP, there are also significant differences in the ways in which our ICT4COP findings envision police-community relations. The UN definition, for example, focuses on a police-led process of gaining the trust of communities to assist police in fighting crime (and other issues of security and order). The ICT4COP recommendations, on the other hand, promote a broad understanding of security which is in line with the concept of human security, and a more equal, mutual relationship between police and communities. The focus of COP thus shifts away a police-led and pre-defined understanding of security problems as crime fighting and crime prevention and towards the discovery of a broader range of insecurities that could be very different for different people. It would also require inclusive and participatory processes, initiated both by police and civil society, that both build trust and manage conflicting interests.

COMMUNITY

While working with communities is a central aspect of COP, it is surprising how seldom conceptual discussions of community appear in the academic literature on community-oriented policing. Where it is found, community is often first and foremost a geographical entity with which the police need to interact in ways that are different than in a purely enforcement approach. Within this geographic unit, the focus is on trying to find the lowest level of common interest and consensus to focus COP initiatives. Some go beyond this by referring to early sociology works on community, where community comprises both locality and community sentiment, with varying degrees of inclusion and exclusion. Despite these variations, the community as a unit

(even when reduced to smaller units) remains as the main understanding of community in COP. This idea of community is also evident in early development assistance literature on the global south, where much of post-conflict reform efforts have been located. In community development projects of the 1960s and 70s, the two aspects of community (as a space and a group of people with something in common) were often conflated, leading to a somewhat romanticized understanding of community as a physical and social 'unit', having a common set of norms and interests. This has since been replaced with more recent empirical evidence of diversity, inequality and unequal power relations in communities. It is these power relations that determine who is seen, supported, affected, included, listened to and ignored when working with communities. Moreover, these relations are not simple, stable and uniform social realities, but dynamic, often changing quickly and dramatically as conditions change in society.

The way community is presented in the COP training materials studied is inconsistent. Some did not mention community at all (except in the title), while others defined it in terms of having shared norms and values. Only a few defined communities as diverse and emphasized the need for inclusivity. Still fewer acknowledged the possibility of conflict within communities and the need for some kind of conflict resolution activities. Ignoring difference and unequal power relations within communities makes it difficult to address the diverse needs and interests that should be included in the definition of COP initiatives at the community level.

GENDER

Since the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, a focus on gender awareness has steadily made its way into most pre-deployment and mission trainings for international police advisors, particularly those run by the UN. What is less clear is how gender is conceptualized in these trainings. Early understandings of gender in development in the 1970s and 80s were based on a binary understanding of gender and differences between men and women. Growing empirical evidence from the global south,

however, revealed that gender issues are more complex than previously imagined. Theoretically, there was a shift from considering women as a unified category, to considering difference among women (and men) in terms of for example race, ethnicity, age, class and identities, and the importance of power relations. The implications of this for COP are significant, in that it is a move away from generalizing women's security situations and towards exploring how different actors explain gendered relations in different ways, and understanding that these explanations are themselves powered and gendered.

The way gender is mentioned in the training materials is either in referring to a vulnerable group or victims of violence to be protected, as a category for inclusion in citizen boards, or in terms of gender inequality, women's rights and challenges of discrimination. Some understand gender as relating to all three of these aspects, and many bring gender aspects into their examples and scenarios. What is consistent, however, is that gender is almost exclusively referred to as a binary concept, with only one exception in the curriculum studied where there was mention of LGBT communities. The differences between women, in terms of race, class, ethnicity, age, religion, language were not mentioned. Also, there was almost no mention of gendered power relations and the role of men in gender inequality. Our research has shown that most reform efforts have focused on increasing the number of women in the police in order to support women victims. While this is an important goal, it does not in itself lead to better understanding of the complex gendered relations in the context of society in general, which underlies not only gendered violence, but influences the ways in which women are included and excluded in COP initiatives.

Another aspect of gender and COP emerged from the interviews with trainers. They confirmed that gender was not always included in COP training, but is often offered in a separate course, ranging from a few hours to a week, depending on the type of course. There is also no guarantee that the police are required to take those courses. Also, if gender is relegated to its own course, and not integrated into how police learn to understand communities and form partnerships, it will likely remain

a separate issue for women police to deal with.

PARTNERSHIPS

The forming of partnerships is also a central aspect of COP and appears prominently in COP training manuals for international police advisors. The way partnerships are understood and who engages in them thus varies in the literature. Some studies describe partnership as collaboration with other security actors. Others focus on police-led partnership with other agencies such as social services and health services, and citizen volunteer groups. However, the community itself is seldom considered a full partner, but rather the object of crime-fighting and crime prevention, and often in a disadvantaged position of power in relation to the police. Also, few delve deeply into the underlying assumptions or theoretical basis for partnerships in community-based policing. Our research on COP in post-conflict contexts under the ICT4COP project pays particular attention to the importance of partnerships as reciprocal and based on mutual trust. They include collaboration with other agencies, local institutions, and the community, which in our cases is considered as a diverse set of interests, needs and relations that need to be discovered and understood through inclusive dialog.

The ways in which partnerships are addressed in the training material also varied. Some mentioned but didn't define the concept, while others described partnerships as working with police-led crime-fighting committees comprising community representatives. Only a few described partnerships as working together on an equal footing with different community groups and individuals in communities to jointly identify and solve broader issues and concerns of the community. And even these were misleading when seen in relation to the scenarios described in the course notes. Police were encouraged to listen to people to gain the trust of the community in order to gain intelligence – community partnerships are only a means to an end, and that end is fighting crime. Thus, it is in the description of how to form partnerships (who to include and for what purpose) that it becomes clear that the idea of COP as based on a broader understanding of insecurities is not reflected

in the training materials. The focus remains a conventional approach to crime-fighting, with the cooperation of community members. Without a clear understanding of this underlying set of values, the police will continue to police through domination, fear and force, despite a COP rhetoric in policy and training materials. Other than these private actors, there was also an expectation by the private sector and government that the military and police also take a role in providing protections. In each of the three countries in focus here this demand for protection has fed into electoral and political platforms in the form of security reforms expressing a need for more forceful tactics to secure law and order. This led to renewed financing for *mano dura* (heavy hand) operations and police units that operated with more militarized tactics and equipment. Although it did not mean the end of adopted COP models, our research in parallel with others suggests they have been either side-lined or used as a means to further legitimize harsh policing tactics.

LESSONS LEARNED

Despite the shortcomings of COP training material in addressing these three important concepts, the trainers interviewed explained that the content of COP training has nevertheless improved significantly over the last years, particularly at the international level. The content is more consistent and comprehensive, with a growing focus on exploring complexity and contextual variation.

REFERENCE

1. Nyborg, I (Forthcoming) 'Who is the Community in Community-Oriented Policing? Linking Community, Gender and Partnerships in Post-Conflict COP Training'
2. These recommendations are summarized in ICT4COP project briefs, presentations and e-Handbook, and can be found at: <http://www.communitypolicing.eu> .

Also, the process of the development of training materials has become more participatory, and included more representation from the post-conflict regions themselves. Nevertheless, all of the respondents stressed that having comprehensive training materials on COP is not sufficient to ensure that the trainees will grasp the underlying meanings of COP, community, gender and partnerships. Their lack of understanding of the theoretical basis of these concepts resulted in teaching using their own experience and understanding, which may be from a very different culture and practice of policing with little basis in a COP philosophy.

This leaves us with at least three important recommendations to improve COP training:

- The main theoretical basis of COP should be revisited to include a broader understanding of insecurities, mutual trust-building, and the central role of civil society and communities in defining community-oriented policing practices.
- Concepts of community, gender and partnerships are interrelated and interdependent, and all need to be addressed in detail in COP training as the basis for police-community relations
- Trainers should have deep conceptual understandings of the key concepts of COP, as well as the pedagogic competence necessary to address these issues in innovative and relevant ways in their teaching

Author Bio

Dr. Ingrid Nyborg is Associate Professor at the Department of International Environment and Development studies, Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Dr. Nyborg leads the ICT4COP project, as well as the Gender and South Asian work packages.

The Project

The ICT4COP research project seeks to understand human security in post-conflict settings by researching community-based policing and post-conflict police reform.

The Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) is the project coordinator.

Contact: Daniel Lohmann, Dissemination Manager, NMBU daniel.lohmann@nmbu.no

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