Digital Mystery: Enhanced Active Citizens' Participation Through Information Communications Technology in Community Policing

David Kumwenda[1]*, Mavuto Tembo[2], Chrispin Mphande[2], Vincent Nundwe[1], Thokozani Andrew Chazema[1]

[1]*Transformative Community Development Programme, Mzuzu University, Mzuzu, Malawi*

[2]*African Centre of Excellence in Neglected and Underutilized Biodiversity, Department of Agrisciences, Mzuzu University, Email: davidkumwenda441@yahoo.com*

Abstracts: The ubiquitous proliferation of mobile phones has made digital surveillance and monitoring both accessible and desirable. Citizens have actively engaged in managing their neighborhood security. The study aims to analyze participatory policing practices that citizens do in their neighbourhood security management and apply Information Communication Technology. To achieve the research objective, the study used mixed methods exploratory sequential design. Qualitative purposive sampling targeted four focus group discussions and one key informant guided by an interview guide. The household survey used randomly sampled 432 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS version 20. Qualitative data analysis follows transcribing, coding, and grouping into sub-themes, themes answering to research objectives. Results show citizens engage neighborhood patrols and they feel responsible and are satisfied with level of participation. Almost every person counts and this includes every gender in securing neighborhoods. Citizens use SMS seconded by WhatsApp and least Telephone calls for participatory activities, have revolutionized communication for (i) reporting and requesting transport on security information to police and CPF members, (ii) for organizing patrols and (iii) mobilizing help during participatory activities in the neighborhoods. ICTs have greatly enhanced citizens' participation in managing security within their neighbourhoods because they accorded real-time updates, real-time responses, and real-time capacity to access prompt assistance through virtual context. Virtual platform accorded wide formal and non-formal communication with authorities and increased social cohesion, collective efficacy and community guardianship improving prevention of crime and the arresting of suspects.

Keywords: Neighborhood, Patrol, Watch, Digital, ICT Applications, Participatory, Surveillance, Monitoring, Mobilize, Security, Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is about citizen participatory activities through information communication technology that promote collaboration and partnership between citizens and law enforcement agencies in community policing. Participatory policing practices refer to initiatives involving citizens acting in identifying and addressing safety and security issues in their neighborhood. They qualify as participatory practicing, where citizens are assisting law enforcement (Mols and Pridmore, 2019). The concept of citizen participation dates back to 1980' in the United States of America (Kumwenda et al., 2023).

Citizens as social actors may report or give clues about threats in their neighborhood for police action when interacting with police officers during police regular patrols. Police regular patrols may be in form of foot or vehicles patrol aiming to enhance visibility in the community (Maqsood et al., 2019). Mobile police service are designated days on a weekly, fortnight, or monthly basis depending on available resources. Are programmed to serve remote communities that otherwise may have to travel long distances to reach police stations. Beneficial for the people in hard-to-reach villages and hilly areas with sparse transport access and road connectivity. Citizens may also inform lawlessness activities to officers during Mobile police service (Maqsood et al., 2019).

Citizens may also practice neighborhood patrols by volunteering to create a team that patrols within the neighborhood to look for any suspicious persons who may commit crimes when chances permit and report them to police. The existence of community forums provides a common platform for various stakeholders to interact to improve security in neighborhoods, such as government, police, and community (Cossyleon, 2019). The primary

objective of these forums is to highlight and address persistent community concerns before these escalate to bigger problems (Maqsood et al., 2019).

Citizens are active in neighborhood watch program where a group of people living in the same area get actively involved to make their neighborhood safer by working together and in conjunction with local law enforcement to reduce crime and improve their quality of life (Clavell et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2022). Obeagu (2014) in Nigeria, recommends regular and continuing training of neighborhood watch members through seminars and workshops on lawful operational tactics and recognition of citizens' fundamental rights.

Some citizens depending on the need have become members of a group of volunteers who decide on their own to stop crime and punish criminals. It is an unofficial way to prevent crime or to catch and punish perpetrators of crime, where there is a conspicuous absence of official police presence to control. In Nigeria, vigilante groups can patrol in cities to deal with rebels reducing fear of crime (Ikuteyijo, 2008). In Tanzania, known as Sungusungu deal with cattle raiders because the police are far from them (Kudo, 2019). Somehow vigilantism is prone to opportunism and can generate violence, corruption, and social othering.

In Indonesia citizens volunteer to rotate patrols by residents in the form of a system for maintaining community security in homes and make them safest place known as the Siskamling system. In Afghanistan volunteer forces known as the Arbakai are military forces composed solely of volunteers, without resorting to a military draft. They aimed at reducing kidnaps of women and children because the police could not help the communities in Afghanistan (Mukerjee & Rahim, 2013).

Citizens benefit from Community awareness-raising by police (Cossyleon, 2019; Maqsood et al., 2019). These activities are planned by police for the community in the form of campaigns and are meant to provide community members with the necessary information required to stay safe and avoid common dangers. All the above may be very convenient through virtual interactions amplifying interactions between citizens and police to manage security.

Finally, complaint management to police is a system where any members of the community can raise their concerns related to the safety of their neighborhood or about the behaviors of police officials. Through digital platform the activity may improve submission of individual and community complaints and providing feedback. The community members can also provide their feedback related to various problems highlighted in the forum (Maqsood et al., 2019). The willingness of members of the public to share information with the police is central to the operation of the criminal justice system (Aston et al., 2021).

1.1. Police Involvement in Communities

Society needs police for the maintenance of law and order, preservation of public peace and protection of human rights (Constitution of Malawi). Police Act provides for community policing fora to influence police citizen partnership (Mutupha &Zhu, 2022). Police are divided into national, regional and local levels (Mols, 2021; Mols and Pridmore, 2019).

At the local level, the police coordinator consults, coordinates and collaborates with citizens to organize police-citizen partnerships. Community Policing Forum members are identified and coordinated at Traditional Authority, Group Village Headmen, and Village Headmen levels. The police Coordinator is responsible for awareness campaigns, advisory and directive roles towards crime management (Mols, 2021; Mols and Pridmore, 2019). In the study the partnership must be guided by Arnstein's (1969) rung no 6 of the ladder of participation Table 1 below, for cooperation, reciprocity and trust (Brewster, et al., 2018) for effective social cohesion, collective efficacy and community guardianship. Police involvement in the neighborhood can improve the social organization of neighborhoods and can decrease feelings of insecurity (Mols and Pridmore, 2019).

Table 1. Rungs of the ladder of participation

Citizen control	8	
Delegation	7	
Partnership	6	Degrees of citizen power
Placation	5	Degrees of tokenism
Consultation	4	
Informing	3	
Therapy	2	Non-participation
Manipulation	1	

Source: (Sherry, 1969)

However, community policing is negatively affected by lack of resources (Ikuteyijo, 2008; Mutupha & Zhu, 2022). In Malawi, community policing is challenged by lack of knowledge by police and lack of recognition of community policing; corrupt practices; lack of confidentiality; poor working relationships; and lack of resources (Mutupha & Zhu, 2022). However, spontaneous and unorganized proliferation of ICT applications in community policing has both supplemented and supplanted conventional policing (Kumwenda et al., 2023: Pridmore et al., 2018). Maqsood et al. (2019) claim that ICTs may augment for lack of resources in community policing in Southeast Asia.

1.2. Application of Icts On Citizens' Participatory Practices

The digital platform has accorded space for the interaction of citizens through forming social networks to solve society's problems. Statistically, it shows, that since 2017, the number of users in social media has increased almost by one billion, reaching a total of 4.2 billion active users by 2021 (Pulido et al., 2021). ICTs play a significant role in all aspects of modern life and have changed people’s ways of communicating, finding needed information, citizens' interaction with others and government agencies on security (Narcyz et al., 2019). Has amplified watchfulness and surveillance practices. Voluntary citizens' participation in crime prevention leads to an increase in social support, the feeling of safety, and the active prevention of offences because it is digital monitoring (Kumwenda et al., 2023; Mols, 2021).

In theory, smartphone applications and social media channels make participatory surveillance practices accessible to all citizens. Attributed to the low threshold to communicate information to WhatsApp groups because it is easy to use the messaging applications already freely available and in use. These messages are not monitored by government institutions and are owned by commercial institutions. The conversations play out in an invisible and uncontrolled environment (Mols and Pridmore, 2019).

Alongside everyday digital connections such as social media, citizens watch one another in person and spend time checking their environment and the behaviors of other citizens in that space. However, voluntary citizens are actively stimulated to take this greater responsibility within their communities to manage potential security risks. They internalize law enforcement strategies and use these in their community. Consequently, citizens become responsible for the safety and security of not only themselves but their communities and fellow citizens (Mols and Pridmore, 2019).

These ICT applications and initiatives are increasingly becoming popular and signal a shift in relations between ordinary citizens and police practices. Through ICT applications and initiatives citizens in the neighborhood exchange warnings, concerns, and information about incidents, emergencies and allegedly suspicious situations. These exchanges lead to neighbors actively protecting and monitoring their area and sending messages about suspicious activities, increasing safety and social cohesion (Mols and Pridmore, 2019). The use of ICT applications and initiatives to manage security may vary from self-organized, citizen-led, do-it-yourself (DIY) policing practices to police-initiated surveillance projects. When applying ICTs in community policing; (i) There are no centralized universal guidelines- anyone can join and participate, it is he/she who feels it. (ii) Be aware and notice suspicious behaviors (iii) Alert the police (iv) Inform the ICT initiative group networks, and (v) React safely.

Malawi police service adopted community policing in 1994, but more of it has been conventional community policing. Characterized by low participation due to lack of resources. The result has been an increased state of

decline influenced by a lack of citizen participation, poor consultations, coordination and collaboration between police and citizens (Mutupha & Zhu, 2022). The use of social media has become pervasive in Malawi because of increased access to mobile devices in both rural and urban Malawi (Kumwenda et al., 2023). There has been social media information sharing related to security, but how citizens participate in managing security through ICTs in community policing is important to know. Are people much more engaged in managing their security now than before ICTs became applicable in citizens' participatory activities in Malawi? The paper sought to analyze citizens' participatory activities in managing security in their neighborhood by applying ICTs in community policing and evaluating their effectiveness.

This study is important because ICT-enhanced community policing may improve consultations coordination and corroboration enhancing security management in neighborhoods within local areas. Results will improve the citizens-police participation and interaction through digital and learn about the challenges of ICT-enhanced community policing in Malawi.

To answer the research objective, analyze participatory policing practices that citizens do in their neighborhood security management and apply Information Communication Technology. The study came up with three specific questions. (1) What participatory activities do citizens do to manage security in their neighborhoods, (2) How are ICTs used to increase citizens participatory activities and (3) How effective are ICT applications in citizens participatory activities?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: methodology which describes the study area, and methods of data collection and analysis. Then presents results on identified citizens participatory activities, how ICTs are applied in citizen participatory activities and ends by analyzing the effectiveness of ICTs in citizens participatory activities.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Area

The study was conducted in Muloza- Mulanje. The area is located at 36 K 792628.97 m E 8220322.32 m S. Muloza is on the east of Mulanje along the border between Malawi and Mozambique. The nearest province is Vila De Milange District to the East of Mozambique less than 10 km from the border. Muloza has unique social security challenges including the use of unchartered routes through the Muloza and Ruo rivers can be attributed to the fact that many border communities share common language and blood ties and claim reciprocal rights to access services. The existence of “international boundaries and territoriality” is often ignored. Formal migration and trade take place at the Muloza border post controlled by the Immigration Department and Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA). Mulanje mountain barriers between Muloza and the mainland of Mulanje and Phalombe. Police are challenged with a lack of resources. Hence criminals take the hard-to-reach areas as safe havens (Kumwenda et al., 2023).

2.2. Research Design

The study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed method design. Mixed methods offset the weaknesses of the other. Data collected from multiple angles bring reliable conclusions. Qualitative aimed to collect data through oral interviews with focus group discussions, to explore and capture people’s attitudes, beliefs, and motives. Quantitative aims to collect data through household surveys, to confirm and generalize qualitative results at a wider level (Kumwenda et al., 2023).

2.3. Data Collection Methods

Focus group discussion and key informant interview

The focus group discussions purposely identified four groups of participants within Muloza-Mulanje (1) 10 police officers, (2) 10 Community Police Forum (CPF) members, (3) 10 citizens and (4) 10 business people. The study

also conducted one key informant interview with police officers at the Regional Police Headquarters at Luchenza. The focus group discussions with participants from police, business persons, citizens and CPF members were more important because these are stakeholders who interact daily in community policing in Muloza and are actors in the phenomena. One key informant interview was conducted with police at Regional Headquarters (South East) because they are experts in guiding community policing.

2.4. Household Survey

The household individual survey used a structured questionnaire and randomly picked 432 participants in Muloza. The sampling technique was guided by Yamene's (1969) formula with a population size of 23,408 (NSO, 2018). The sample size was distributed as in Table 1 below. The structured questionnaire had questions on demographics, citizens participatory activities, how ICTs are applied in citizen participatory activities and the effectiveness of ICTs in citizens participatory activities.

Table 2. Showing quantitative random distribution of respondents in locations of Muloza

Location	Number of participants
Limbuli	43
Muloza	44
Gawani	43
Maliyera	43
Naamani	43
Sathawa	43
Songwe	43
Manayamba	43
Namasalima	44
Ruo	43
Total	**432**

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative interviews were transcribed, edited then uploaded in the NVivo (Version 12) software package. An initial coding scheme was developed with research questions providing a framework for labelling each category of data. Thematic analysis was conducted, utilizing nodes as the method of identifying emerging themes. Described this as a ‘cross-sectional code and retrieve method’, which is used to organize and highlight in a systematic manner emerging themes found in data. This method of analysis, however, is not without its critics with arguments made regarding a loss of context during the coding process. In an attempt to retain important contextual information where appropriate larger ‘chunks’ of data were included in the coding process which allows contextual information to be maintained (Aston et al., 2021).

Data from structured questionnaires were analyzed by descriptive statistics using frequencies, percentages and charts. The data was analysed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 20.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Based on the data collected from 432 respondents, there were 49.1% females and 50.9% males with an average age of 38.96 years. The marital status was that 5.3% were divorced, 7.2 % were separated, 10.2 % were widowed, 20.8 % were single, and 56.5% were married. It was found that 16.0% never attended and 2.5% attended adult school. The larger proportion of the respondents attained primary, secondary and tertiary education 32.2%, 38.9 % and 10.4 % respectively. The occupations of the respondents were 6.7 % school going, 7.6% casual labour, 16.2 % formal employment, 16.4 % skilled employment, 26.2 % farmer, 26.9 % petty traders/business with an average income of MK 103, 262.82.

Table 3. Have you ever participated in any neighborhood watch patrol or vigilante activities in your community?

	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	288	67.0
No	142	33.0
Total	430	100.0

Source: own survey (2023)

4.2. Citizens Participatory Activities

In response to the question "What participatory activities do you engage to manage security in your neighborhoods?" Household survey results in Table 3 above reveal that 67% of respondents agreed to have participated in neighborhood watch patrol activities in managing their neighborhood security. Household survey results in Table 4 below show that 90.3% of respondents confirm they feel personally responsible for the safety and security of their neighborhood, and Table 5. below show that 78.5% agree that citizen participation in ensuring neighborhood safety and security is very important. Table 6. results indicate 71.2% of respondents are very satisfied with the level of citizen participation in neighborhood safety and security practices in the community.

The interpretation is that citizens engage neighborhood patrols as participatory activity to manage security in their neighborhoods. Citens are more zealous than police on taking charge of security. Almost every person counts and this includes every gender. Citizens perceives, security on democratic roots (Hoogensen & Rottem, 2004). The implication is that police are not actively involved in neighborhood patrols. The evidence to show that citizens were engaged in neighborhood watch patrols is substantiated in recorded statements during focus group discussions as evidenced by following statements:

"As CPF members, we always form neighborhood patrol groups of about 40 members. We do patrols to monitor the people who just move aimlessly at night with intentions to commit offences" (CPFGD Reference 1).

"The CPF members do patrols within the market area and if they encounter challenges, they make telephone calls to police for assistance on transport or manpower reinforcement" (CPFGD Reference 5).

"It is our responsibility to participate by doing patrols and communicating on social media with fellow citizens, CPF and police" (CFGD Reference 1).

"Police stopped doing patrols in 2022, helping night neighborhood patrols. Police officers on police patrols were able to join the neighborhood patrols to beef up security" (CPFGD Reference 2).

"By the end of 2022, police officers did vehicle patrols once during night times. This means that if we may have police vehicle and police foot patrols together with our CPF neighborhood patrols there could be enhanced security" (CPFGD Reference 3).

Results are similar to Pridmore et al. (2018) that safety starts with citizens who take responsibility to joint efforts to manage their security in their neighborhoods. Mols (2021) Citizens are social actors, can aid police and make the social control process more effective because they stay in the community where crime occur and know suspects. Contrary to citizen's zealousness, Yero et al. (2012) claim community oriented-policing may bring back memories of Marxian revolutionary stages of the state where in the end the people will rise up to the challenges of their time and take charge of state affairs in the "government of the people" or rather the proletariat state.

Table 4. Do you feel personally responsible for the safety and security of your neighborhood?

	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	389	90.3
No	42	9.7
Total	**431**	**100.0**

Source: Own survey (2023)

Table 5. In your opinion, how important is citizen participation in ensuring neighborhood safety and security?

	Frequency	Per cent
Very important	333	78.5
Some important	65	15.3
Somewhat unimportant	4	.9
Not at all important	3	.7
Total	424	100.0

Source: Own survey (2023)

Table 6. How satisfied are you with the level of citizen participation in neighborhood safety and security practices in your community?

	Frequency	Per cent
Very satisfied	294	71.2
Somewhat satisfied	86	20.8
Neutral	26	6.3
Somewhat dissatisfied	4	1.0
Very dissatisfied	3	.7
Total	**413**	**100.0**

Source: Own survey (2023)

4.3. ICT application used in citizen participatory activities

In response to the question, “How are ICTs used to increase citizens participatory activities?” Quantified responses from focus group discussion fig 1 below, reveal that citizens mentioned Telephone calls for reporting and requesting transport on security information to police and CPF members at 25. CPF members mentioned Telephone for organizing patrols15 times. Telephone for mobilizing help and WhatsApp for reporting tied at the mention 10 times each. Police was found to use Telephone calls, SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook because of nature of their job (Kumwenda et al., 2023). To confirm and generalize qualitative results, household survey results in Table 7 below indicate that ICT applications used by citizens during participatory activities for neighborhood safety and security purposes were SMS application at 49.9%, seconded by WhatsApp application at 38.8% and least by phone call application at 24.2%. Table 8 below reveal 67.2 % of respondents used ICT applications to report safety and security incidents to law enforcement agencies. Table 9 below results indicate ICT applications allow citizens share information about suspicious activities on crime in the neighborhood at 79.2%, alert neighbors about potential security threats or emergencies at 67.5% and organizing community patrols at 26.4%.

The interpretation is that, SMS, WhatsApp and telephone call applications have revolutionized security management where citizens were able to (i) report and request transport on security information to police and CPF members, (ii) used for organizing patrols and (iii) mobilizing help during participatory activities in the neighborhoods. Implication is ICTs provide wide participation characterized by formal and non-formal communications, increased and enhanced citizen engagement, collaboration and partnership. More of neighborhood management is done by citizens. There is less participation by police in neighborhood patrols. Self-organized and do-it-yourself styles of virtual communication takes the lead. The evidence of enhanced consultations, collaboration and coordination through ICTs in managing security by citizens is evidenced by what respondents pointed out during interviews:

“When I call a neighbor through telephone, neighbor also calls other many neighbors. In the end, we may have alerted each other about managing security within our neighborhood through Telephone calls where no person suspects us. If suspects have targeted my neighbor’s house and I happen to see them, I would simply dial my telephone to alert others so that we can mobilize to intervene in the issue” (MBFGD Reference 1).

“At Makokola village within Gawani area. Criminals attacked the house of a community member. Neighbors managed to call through telephone to some of us alerting us of the development. I also called through telephone some four friends to come to our help. We managed to mobilize about 20 of us. The criminals who were outnumbered started running away” (BFGD Reference 2).

"At Limbuli the citizens and CPF members mobilized through telephone calls and managed to overpower the criminals where they managed to arrest one suspect and kill one criminal" (PFGD Reference 1).

"When I see any suspicious activity during the night, I always call through telephone to get assistance" (CFGDReference 10).

Results are similar to Mols and Pridmore (2019) that use of ICT applications in participatory activities vary from self-organized, citizen-led, do-it-yourself (DIY) policing practices. No centralized universal guidelines to control joining and participation.

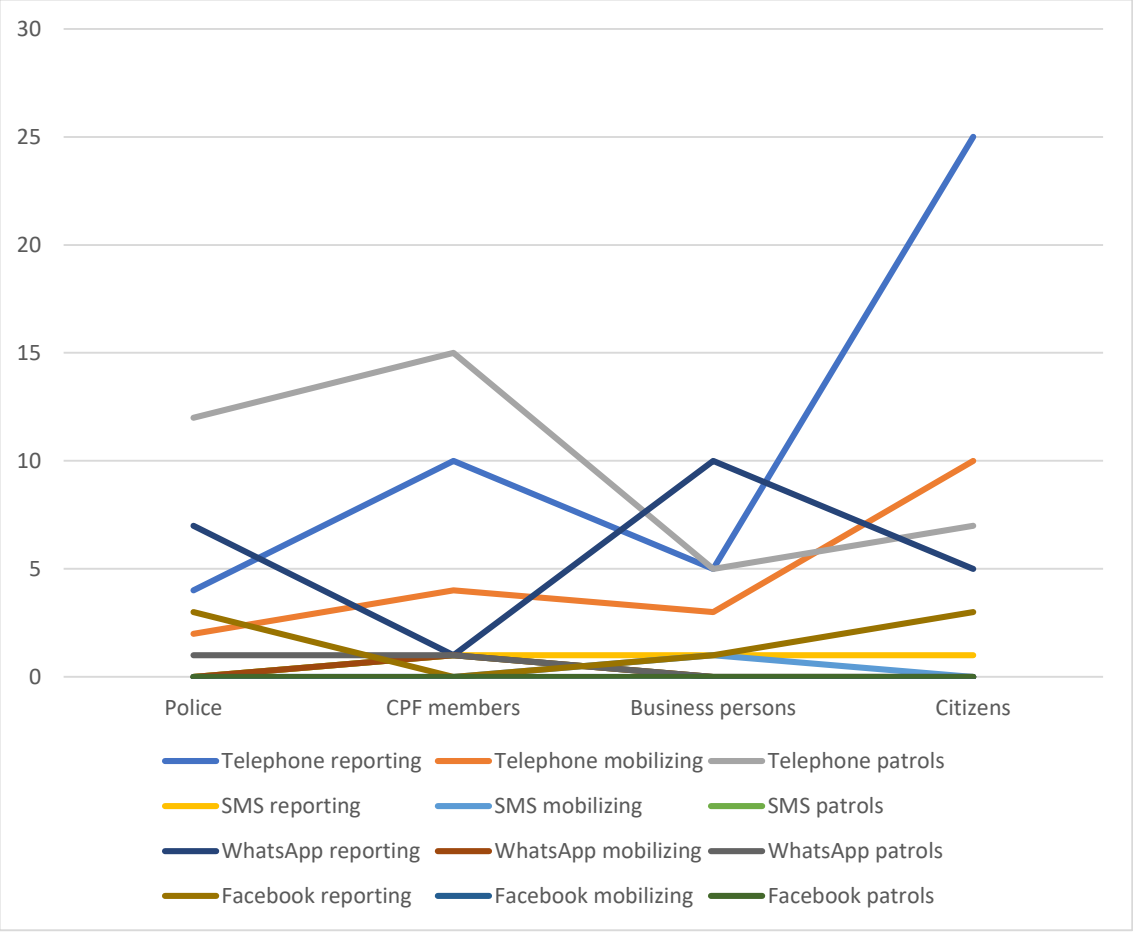

Fig 1: Showing quantified responses during focus group discussions on usage of ICT applications during citizens participatory activities to manage security.

Table 7. Which of the following ICT applications have you ever used for neighborhood safety and security purposes?

	Frequency	Per cent
WhatsApp	165	38.8
Facebook	39	9.2
Twitter	5	1.2
SMS	212	49.9
Phone calls	103	24.2
Instagram	10	2.4
Email	11	2.6
Internet	26	6.1
TikTok	11	2.6

Source: Own survey (2023)

Table 8. How often do you use ICT tools to report safety and security incidents to law enforcement agencies?

	Frequency	Percent
Less often	100	23.3
More often	135	31.5
Not at all	41	9.6
Often	153	35.7
Total	**429**	**100.0**

Source: Own survey (2023)

Table 9. In what ways have you used digital platforms for neighborhood safety and security purposes?

	Frequency	Percent
Sharing information about suspicious activities on crimes in the neighborhood	336	79.2
Alerting neighbors about potential security threats or emergencies	286	67.5
Organizing community patrols or watch groups	144	34.0
Coordinating with police officers for neighborhood safety and security	112	26.4
Never used	17	4.0

Source: Own survey (2023)

4.4. Effectiveness of Icts in Participatory Activities

In response to the question, *"How effective are ICT applications in citizens participatory activities?"* House hold survey results in Table 10 below indicate 84.5 % of respondents confirm use of digital platforms has positively affected citizen participation in neighbourhood safety and security responsibilities. Table 11. below reveal 71.2 % of respondents are very satisfied with the overall level of safety and security in their neighbourhood.

This may be interpreted, ICTs have greatly enhanced citizens' participation in managing security within their neighbourhoods because ICT applications accorded real-time updates, real-time responses, and real-time capacity to access prompt assistance through virtual context. Implication, virtual platform accorded wide participation with formal and non-formal communication with authorities, increased social cohesion, collective efficacy and community guardianship. Citizens actively took ownership of their neighbourhoods, became more engaged, alert and reporting to police or neighbourhoods preventing crime and arresting of suspects. The evidence from interview statements is not limited to the following:

"WhatsApp is more efficient because allows taking and sending of pictures and videos of evidence to police that is used to nab a notorious criminal" PFGD Reference 3).

"Wide participation of citizens through WhatsApp and Facebook will allow citizens to share with anybody on sensitive issue which others might have been hiding. And once the issue has been widely deposited many audiences may have the chance to see and make a follow up, influencing reduction of corruption" (CPFGD Reference 4).

"When police have arrested suspect, we share through WhatsApp with other police formations for identification if the suspect could be wanted by them too. Social media defeats lack of resources such as transport and time" (PFGD Reference 6).

"People send various security related issues on WhatsApp and law enforcers are able to learn that someone has violated someone's rights, immediately investigations may be instituted. For example, a bus driver was driving carelessly and recklessly and one passenger recorded a video then uploaded on WhatsApp group. Immediately, the members started commenting and some police officers too were on the group. They informed their traffic friends on duty along the road. They stopped and apprehended the driver" (PFGD Reference 7).

"The advent of social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook have allowed other citizens who may be concerned to act by recording the activity and secretly sharing with other groups. In the long run there is no hiding of the

issue" (PFGD Reference 4).

"Sometimes, those who upload videos and picture on WhatsApp are forced to do so because they do not know where to complain. In short social media has allowed wide participation and does not follow formal structures" (PFGD Reference 1).

"ICT applications have allowed police and citizens to build good criminal intelligence because of WhatsApp group initiative which has even gone beyond our borders in Mozambique" (PFGD Reference 2).

"The child went missing at Kanjedza in Blantyre. Through Facebook and WhatsApp sharing the information between police of Muloza and Blantyre. The Muloza police also linked up with Mozambique counterparts and indeed the child was found in Mozambique. This shows how important social media is on prompt and wide participation" (PFGD Reference 9).

"WhatsApp overrides differences between networks. We can share, and deposit security-related materials promptly and effectively" (PFGD Reference 11).

"Last night a gang of criminals had invaded someone's house intending to steal from him. Through telephone calls, we mobilized and managed to arrest one suspect and also managed to kill one suspect" (CFGD Reference 1).

Results are similar to Kumwenda et al, (2023) that digital platform has enhanced citizen positive engagement because of real-time updates, real-time responses, and real-time capacity to access hard-to-reach populations through virtual. Pridmore et al. (2018) surveillance and monitoring has become more accessible and desirable.

Table 10. How do you think the use of digital platforms has affected citizen participation in neighborhood safety and security practices?

	Frequency	Percent
Do not know	21	4.9
Negatively	39	9.0
No effect	7	1.6
Positively	365	84.5
Total	**432**	**100.0**

Source: Own survey (2023)

Table 11. How satisfied are you with the overall level of safety and security in your neighbourhood?

	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	304	71.2
Somewhat satisfied	66	15.5
Neutral	46	10.8
Somewhat dissatisfied	6	1.4
Very dissatisfied	5	1.2
Total	**427**	**100.0**

Source: Own survey (2023)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Results show citizens participate in neighborhood patrols and they feel personally responsible because it is very important for them and are satisfied with level of participation. Almost every person counts and this includes every gender in securing neighborhoods. Citizens use SMS seconded by WhatsApp and least Telephone calls, and have revolutionized communication for (i) reporting and requesting transport on security information to police and CPF members, (ii) for organizing patrols and (iii) mobilizing help during participatory activities in the neighborhoods. ICTs have greatly enhanced citizens' participation in managing security within their neighbourhoods because they accorded real-time updates, real-time responses, and real-time capacity to access prompt assistance through virtual context. Virtual platform accorded wide formal and non-formal communication with authorities and increased social cohesion, collective efficacy and community guardianship, preventing crime and arresting suspects.

Based on findings, police must take the leading role in citizen participatory activities and civic educating on the importance and advantage of public attention to messaging (ICT applications) because can have different effects on crime, participating neighbors become more alert and more willing to contact the police or their neighbors, and that citizens take more measures to prevent crime.

The study recommends more research on the challenges of the deployment of ICT applications for the detection and investigation of crimes in community policing.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. Co-authors have reviewed and agreed to the manuscript, and there is no financial interest to report. The submission is original and not under review elsewhere.

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