

Sub-county policing model facilitating urban crime - experts

BY BENSON TUMUSIIME

KAMPALA. Last year, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Abbas Byakagaba provided the country with an update on the implementation of the sub-county policing model, a directive from President Museveni aimed at decentralising policing services to every sub-county, municipal, and town council in Uganda.

More than 10,000 officers were transferred to different sub-counties to roll out the model, but they were not replaced under any special arrangement.

According to security experts, however, the sub-county model has left a vacuum in deployment, especially in Kampala, because of limited police manpower.

A senior retired police detective, speaking anonymously, said crimes in the city are rising due to reduced police visibility. He explained that the situation worsened when police disbanded most posts, merged them with larger stations, and withdrew 1,000 officers from various units to implement the directive.

The detective noted that police now face an uphill battle in planning, coordinating, and preventing security threats in Kampala Metropolitan areas.

"Some of the police booths and posts in Kampala city were closed down; those that remained, their manpower was reduced, and this has become a challenge to police in terms of deployment and steady fast capabilities to fight criminals," the detective said.

Also, the model means that the deployment of 18 police officers per sub-county will total 39,420 personnel. Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs last year estimated the total police force at over 54,000, against a population of 45 million, it falls below the internationally recognised ratio of 1:500. This reaffirms the detective's claim on the need for urgent recruitment and training of more police officers.

A businessman, who doubles as a police informer in the Central Business District, echoed similar concerns. He warned that business is now at risk because criminals who had fled during intensified police operations have returned, emboldened by the thinning police presence.

"Most of the police officers, especially those from general duties and crime intelligence, who knew and understood city operations were transferred to sub-counties, and this has created a very big gap as far as crime trends are concerned," the businessman said.

The senior retired police detective added that what is emerging is not just isolated incidents but a disturbing pattern: Ugandans losing lives in violent crimes carried out with machetes rather than guns.

The Internal Affairs Minister, Maj Gen Kahinda Otafiire, yesterday said: "I am a policy maker, if there is an increase in crime in the country for any reason, the Inspector General of Police is the one responsible because he heads that beat, I refer you to him for that matter."

The Leader of Opposition in Parliament, Mr Joel Ssenyonyi, said: "On the issue of increase in urban crime, Uganda has the second youngest population globally. Much of that young population is unemployed, has no access to social services and amenities, that's why you hear cases of iron bar hitmen, and other crimes as they struggle to survive. These helpless young people are a time bomb that is waiting to explode, and yet if we do the right things as a country we can



Joel Ssenyonyi, Leader of Opposition in Parliament.

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make good use of all this young energy."

"The cost of doing business in Uganda is high, so many small start-ups fail, leaving people languishing...we need to address the factors that push young people into crime. Our priorities are the wrong side up. The State [prioritises] keeping itself in power and hunting down the Opposition, instead of addressing the critical concerns of the citizenry," Mr Ssenyonyi added.

Kampala is now grappling with a spike in violent crimes, robberies and murders, recorded in just two weeks across Mukono, Kampala, and Wakiso districts. Most attacks occur inside homes and workplaces, carried out with knives and sharp weapons. Recent cases include: Uganda Christian University's Director of Student Affairs, Pamela Tumwebaze, attacked at her Mukono home and later succumbing to injuries; two employees at Dave Hotel and Suites in Lungujja stabbed to death, with the female manager suspected of sexual assault before the killers fled with a vehicle. The others are social media influencer Diana Namulinde, known as Diana Skys, allegedly strangled inside her Kyanja apartment by a neighbourhood guard.

Analysts warn that the recent killings, similar in method and targeting private spaces, have left residents deeply unsettled. Criminals increasingly view homes and workplaces as soft targets with minimal surveillance.

When contacted, Director of Criminal Investigations AIGP Magambo reassured the public that: "The country is largely peaceful, those involved in these isolated cases of criminality, the jail awaits them, they will surely get what they are looking for, our streets and homes must remain safe for our people."

Police statistics, however, paint a worrying picture. The 2024 annual crime report shows an increase of 2 percent in murders nationwide, with stabbing cases rising from 257 in 2023 to 268 in 2024, and strangulation cases jumping from 414 to 491.

Residents, meanwhile, are changing routines, locking up earlier, hiring private guards, and avoiding late-night movements. For several families, the question is no longer who committed the crimes but whether the systems meant to protect them are working. After all, when homes are no longer safe, insecurity creeps in through every crack.

Police say investigations are ongoing, but communities remain gripped by fear. Reassurance, residents argue, will require not just promises but boots on the ground.