Community Engagement: A Case Study in Trinidad

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Abstract

Community engagement is a defining feature of contemporary crime prevention as reflected in international research. In Trinidad, one such project focused on community engagement for the development of safety plans with the intentions of reducing crime and violence while increasing feelings of safety. In 2015, The University of Trinidad and Tobago via the Institute for Criminology and Public Safety was commissioned by the Citizen Security Programme to conduct this project. Over a period of one year, fourteen community consultations were completed with eight Community Liaisons and nine Community Action Officers being trained in facilitation techniques and one-hundred and seventy-two community members trained in Community Safety Plan Development. Twelve comprehensive community safety plans were then developed by trained community members and presented to internal and external stakeholders. This paper reflects on this particular initiative which combined the efforts of The University of Trinidad and Tobago and The Citizen Security Programme in the development of community safety plans. Reflections were guided by critical themes and issues as identified within the existing North American and European literature on effective community engagement. For instance, one critical issue which arose was that of alignment of outreach objectives to community needs. There was indeed an overlap between objectives and needs, but they were not totally synonymous with each other. Some needs were common among communities but others had unique issues altogether. Further, topics that were not at all part of the programme’s objectives were included by residents in community safety plans. While the long term effects and outcomes of the project are unknown, we were certainly able to undertake a comprehensive review of the community engagement experience against critical issues in the existing literature.

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