



# Strategies for Enhancing the Reforms in the Performance of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations as a Law Enforcement Agency in Kenya

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## Abstract

The Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) plays a vital role in Kenya's law enforcement system, tackling complex crimes including cybercrime, terrorism, financial fraud, and narcotics. However, operational challenges, limited public engagement, and calls for accountability have underscored the need for reform. This study examined the strategies adopted to enhance the DCI's performance through personnel, structural, and technological reforms. Employing a mixed-methods approach and descriptive survey design, the study targeted 5,383 DCI officers, alongside over 100,000 civil society actors and Nyumba Kumi members. A total of 384 respondents were selected using cluster, stratified, random, and purposive sampling. Data were collected through questionnaires (184 valid responses), interviews with eight Regional Criminal Investigations Officers (RCIOs), and eight Focus Group Discussions with community stakeholders. A pilot was conducted in Kericho County to ensure reliability and validity. Descriptive findings revealed that 71.73% of officers viewed continuous training and merit-based promotions as key to enhancing performance, while 57.06% supported transparent recruitment and community policing. Only 28.8% cited improved technology and infrastructure as critical, highlighting disparities in implementation. Qualitative data from RCIOs emphasised uneven resource distribution, limited training access, and centralised decision-making as key challenges. Civil society respondents underscored the need for trust-building through regular police-community dialogues. The study concludes that effective reform requires more than policy directives; it demands investment in human capital, decentralisation of decision-making, technological capacity building, and community collaboration to improve the DCI's performance and public legitimacy.

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## Introduction

The Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) is one of Kenya's foremost law enforcement bodies, operating under the umbrella of the National Police Service. Tasked with investigating serious and



often complex crimes – ranging from terrorism and organised crime to cybercrime, financial fraud, narcotics offences, and homicide – the DCI plays a critical role in upholding justice and safeguarding national security. Beyond investigations, the agency also provides forensic expertise and intelligence that supports the prosecution of criminal cases. With operational presence in every region of the country, the effectiveness of the DCI has a direct impact on public confidence, not only in the police service but also in the wider criminal justice system.

The success of police reforms is deeply intertwined with public trust in law enforcement. As Millar et al. (2021) observe, when police performance fails to meet public expectations, confidence in the police begins to erode. This erosion fosters fear, suspicion, and a growing disconnect between officers and the communities they serve. Over time, this creates a vicious cycle: the more distant the police become, the harder it is to implement meaningful reform. Gyamfi (2022) echoes this concern, noting that public trust is not merely desirable – it is essential for maintaining peace, ensuring safety, and facilitating effective crime prevention. In contexts where police visibility is limited or where citizens fear retaliation, the relationship becomes strained, making reform even more challenging to sustain.

One of the most widely supported reform strategies – both in literature and in practice – is capacity building. Dos Santos et al. (2021) argue that well-trained officers are not only more productive but also experience reduced occupational stress, contributing to overall performance improvements. Wozniak (2017) reinforces this point, highlighting the importance of developing skills in areas such as cybercrime, forensics, and human rights observance. Such competencies are increasingly vital as law enforcement adapts to the complexity of modern crime.

In the Kenyan context, structured career progression and merit-based promotion are especially critical. Ong'ale and Masiga (2021) advocate for reforms within the DCI that prioritise fairness in deployment, professional growth, and work-life balance, particularly for female officers. Their research suggests that when officers feel valued and supported, morale improves, and so does institutional effectiveness. A clearly defined chain of command, transparent decision-making processes, and equitable treatment are all necessary components in driving reform from within.

Another vital strategy is the active inclusion of the public and stakeholders in the reform process. As noted by Gjelsvik (2020) and Ordu and Nnam (2017), meaningful engagement with communities fosters legitimacy, strengthens accountability, and reduces resistance to change. Reform becomes more than a top-down initiative; it becomes a shared responsibility. This is especially evident in community policing, where ongoing dialogue and mutual trust between officers and residents are central to success.

Engel et al. (2020) add that for reforms to take root, they must be evidence-based, participatory, and adaptive. Implementing change in law enforcement – an institution traditionally resistant to transformation – requires a phased, inclusive approach. Structural changes alone are not enough; attention must also be given to behaviours, values, and the everyday working culture of officers.

While existing studies highlight the importance of capacity building, public trust, and evidence-based policing, there is limited empirical research focusing on how such reforms are specifically implemented within specialised investigative units, such as the DCI. Most reform discussions in Kenya centre on the broader police service, leaving a gap in understanding how strategic reforms translate into improved performance within the DCI's operational context. This study addresses that gap.



Against this backdrop, the current study explores the strategies adopted by the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) in Kenya to enhance its performance through reform. The research examines how continuous training, stakeholder engagement, fair promotion, and adaptive management are being employed to enhance the institution's strength. By anchoring these strategies within the DCI's operational reality, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of what effective, sustainable reform looks like in practice.

This work holds practical and policy relevance for Kenya's law enforcement sector. It provides actionable insights for policymakers, regulatory agencies, and DCI leadership, highlighting areas where reform efforts can be more effectively targeted or scaled up. Officers themselves stand to benefit through improved working conditions, clearer career paths, and enhanced institutional support.

For the academic community, the study contributes to ongoing debates about police reform in developing countries. It reaffirms the role of public trust, fairness, and participation as foundational to effective policing and offers a pathway towards building a more transparent, accountable, and responsive investigative service.

### **Study design**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the impact of strategic reforms on the performance of Kenya's Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI). Guided by a concurrent triangulation design, it integrated quantitative data from structured Likert-scale questionnaires and qualitative insights from open-ended interviews. This combination enabled both statistical analysis of reform outcomes and a deeper understanding of contextual experiences and challenges. A descriptive survey and ethnographic elements were used to capture both measurable effects and lived realities, ensuring a comprehensive and balanced analysis of reform implementation within the DCI.

### **Study sites**

The study sites consisted of DCI offices spread across the eight administrative regions in Kenya, namely Nairobi, Central, Coast, Eastern, North Eastern, Nyanza, Rift Valley, and Western, which were accessed through the respective Regional and County DCI Officers. This ensured a representative and contextually diverse understanding of reform strategies across varying operational environments.

### **Study population**

The study contacted 5,383 officers from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI), encompassing all eight regions of Kenya. In addition, it engaged a broad cross-section of civil society—representing a population of over 100,000 individuals—including members of the Law Society of Kenya (LSK), the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), Haki Africa, Human Rights Watch Kenya (HRW-Kenya), the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), and participants in the *Nyumba Kumi* community policing initiative.

### **Sample size and sampling**

A total sample of 384 respondents was selected through a multistage sampling approach. This included 230 DCI officers who completed questionnaires and 154 participants drawn from Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, which, as noted by Memon et al. (2020), is well-suited for calculating sample sizes in studies employing probability sampling methods.

### **Data collection**

Quantitative data were collected through closed-ended questions focusing on personnel reforms, technology, and law reforms. Qualitative data were obtained through open-ended questions targeting



DCI officers holding ranks from Senior Superintendent of Police and below, providing in-depth insights into their experiences with the implementation of reform. An interview guide that combined both structured and semi-structured elements was used to collect rich, qualitative feedback. As Kothari (2004) notes, interviews allow respondents to provide factual responses while also expressing reflective opinions and perceptions.

### **Validity and reliability**

A measurement instrument gains construct validity when it accurately reflects the theoretical concepts it is intended to evaluate. The researchers worked toward construct validity by developing proper operational procedures for their tested key elements. A content-valid approach was achieved by having sufficient measurement items in each tested domain, allowing for comprehensive feedback that addressed the concerns. The consistency and accuracy of measuring particular concepts and phenomena in research determine reliability (Balwan et al., 2022). This research analysed the internal reliability of instruments because they employed multi-item scales across multiple constructs (Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Reliability was ensured with Cronbach's Alpha above 0.7, and validity was assessed through pilot studies.

*Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Quantitative Data*

Item	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Personnel reforms	0.841	10
Technology Reforms	0.779	9
Performance of DCI	0.805	5
Overall reliability	0.821	24

The reliability measures for personnel reforms yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of  $r = 0.841$ , while that of Technology Reforms was 0.779. Cronbach's Alpha for the effective performance variable reached a value of  $r = 0.805$ , and the overall reliability was 0.821 (**Table 1**). All these were above the Cronbach's Alpha threshold of 0.7, which meant that the instrumentation was reliable in terms of internal consistency (Barbera et al. 2020).

### **Data analysis**

The study employed SPSS to analyse quantitative data, summarising responses using means, percentages, and standard deviations. The results were presented using tables and charts for ease of interpretation, enabling a clear understanding of the patterns and trends in the data. Qualitative responses were analysed through content analysis, enabling the identification of key themes and gaining deeper insights from participants. This enriched the findings by adding context and meaning beyond the numerical data.

### **Ethical consideration**

Ethical approval was obtained from Mount Kenya University, the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (reference number 890773), and the Directorate of Criminal Investigations. The researcher ensured voluntary participation, anonymity, and data integrity. Informed consent was obtained, and all ethical protocols governing research involving human subjects in Kenya were strictly followed throughout the study.

### **Results**

The response rate is shown in Table 2.



*Table 2: Response rate*

Respondents	Research Instruments	Sampled	Responded	Response Rate
DCI Officers	Questionnaires	230	184	80.0
Regional criminal investigations officers	KIIs	8	7	87.5
Civil Society groups (LSK, IPOA, Haki Africa, HRW-Kenya, KNCHR) and Nyumba Kumi members	FGDs	13	8	61.5
Average				76.3

As shown in Table 2, out of the 230 DCI officers who were issued with questionnaires, 184 returned fully completed responses – an encouraging response rate of 80% for the quantitative component of the study. The semi-structured interviews with Regional Criminal Investigations Officers (RCIOs) yielded a strong participation rate of 87.5%, with seven out of eight officers participating. Additionally, eight Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were successfully conducted with members of civil society and Nyumba Kumi out of a planned 13, translating to a response rate of 61.54%. These levels of participation are consistent with existing research; for example, Nyumba et al. (2018) observed that most studies typically conduct around seven FGDs, while Monique and Kaiser (2022) noted that saturation in studies involving relatively similar populations is often reached with 4 to 8 focus groups or 9 to 17 interviews. Overall, the study achieved an average response rate of 76.34%, which is considered excellent in survey-based research (Sataloff & Vontela, 2021) and sufficient to address the research objectives.

Beyond the figures, the voices of participants offered valuable insight. The RCIOs spoke openly about the practical challenges they face when implementing reforms. They noted that training opportunities often tend to favour officers in urban areas, leaving rural stations at a disadvantage. They also highlighted difficulties in adopting new technologies due to inadequate infrastructure and limited digital skills among officers. Some officers expressed concern that most reform decisions were made centrally, with little flexibility granted to regional commands to adapt reforms to local needs.

From the community side, participants in the FGDs shared a sense of mistrust in the DCI, raising concerns about perceived favouritism in recruitment and a lack of transparency in police operations. They called for stronger public engagement through regular forums and barazas as a way to rebuild trust and strengthen collaboration between the police and the communities they serve. A consistent message across the discussions was the importance of improving officer welfare, not only as a matter of fairness, but also as a means of reducing corruption and improving morale. Taken together, these lived experiences highlighted the need for reforms that are not only strategic on paper but also practical, inclusive, and rooted in the everyday realities of policing in Kenya.

### **Descriptive results**

#### *Strategies for enhancing reforms and improving DCI performance*

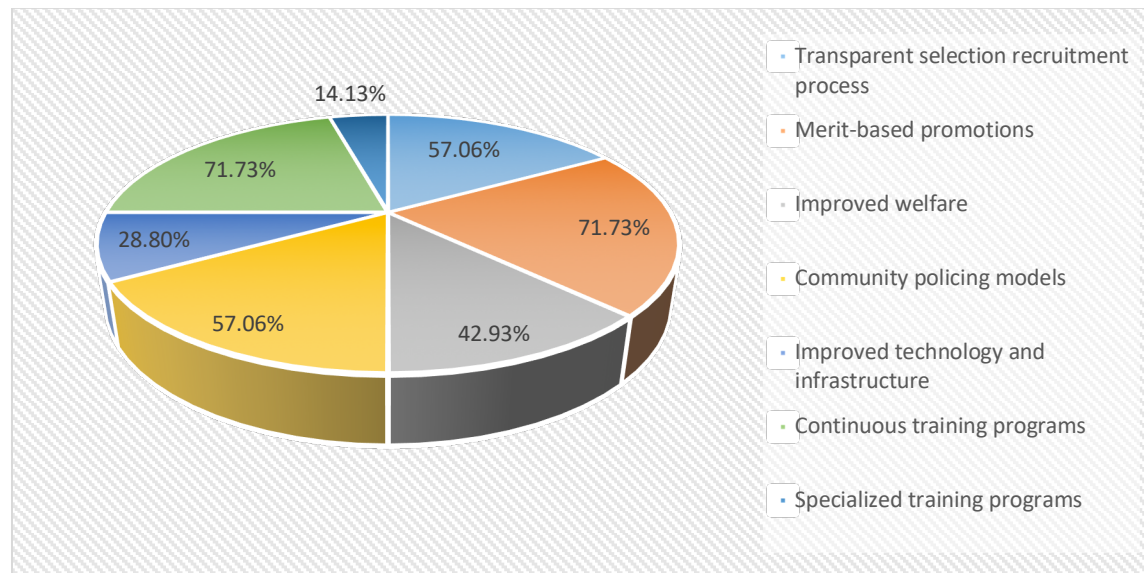
The study sought to establish strategies for enhancing reforms and improving DCI performance. The study revealed a complex landscape of progress and challenges in implementing the reforms, encompassing various aspects of police work, from recruitment and training to community engagement and the adoption of technology. Therefore, through the lens of the Peelian Principles Theory and Legitimacy Theory, which provide a framework that guided this study, the participants were given a table of indicators on some of the best practices that relate to perceived issues that would enhance organisational competence for effective policing. The results are as presented in Table 3.



*Table 3: Strategies for enhancing reforms and improving DCI performance*

Indicator	Frequency n=184	Percentage (%)
Transparent selection recruitment process	105	57.06
Merit-based promotions	132	71.73
Improved welfare	79	42.93
Community policing models	105	57.06
Improved technology and infrastructure	53	28.80
Continuous training programmes	132	71.73
Specialised training programmes	26	14.13

Source: Author, 2024



*Figure 1. Strategies for enhancing reforms and improving DCI performance*

According to OSCE (2018), the increasing complexity of crime, rising security threats, and the demand for people-centred policing in democratic societies require law enforcement officers who are well-educated, adaptable, and skilled in problem-solving, creative thinking, and open-mindedness. These demands highlight the importance of continuous training. In addition, globalisation has added layers of complexity to police work, further reinforcing the need for ongoing professional development. In this context, study participants identified continuous training as a key driver of reform and improved performance within the Directorate of Criminal Investigations. They strongly expressed the view that



regular and structured training programmes are essential in equipping officers to respond effectively to evolving challenges in law enforcement.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study suggest that the performance of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) in Kenya is closely tied to how reforms are introduced and implemented. Across different ranks and roles, participants expressed a shared view that meaningful progress depends on several key strategies—particularly capacity building, technological integration, stronger internal accountability, and more active stakeholder involvement. These elements are seen not as optional extras, but as essential for building a modern, responsive investigative service.

Among the most commonly raised concerns was the issue of training. Many officers emphasised the importance of regular, up-to-date training to keep pace with the increasing complexity of modern crime. They noted that investigations now increasingly involve areas like cybercrime, financial fraud, and digital forensics—fields that demand new skills and fresh thinking. While some training initiatives were acknowledged, participants often described them as patchy, limited to a few units, or underfunded. This meant that some officers felt ill-equipped to deal with today's criminal landscape, which in turn slows down the pace of reform.

Technology also played a prominent role in the conversations. There was broad agreement that digital tools, if used effectively, can help streamline investigations and improve case outcomes. However, the reality on the ground appears to be more complex. Some officers reported challenges in using digital systems, from case management software to surveillance platforms, often due to insufficient training or lack of equipment. It was evident that technology alone is not a silver bullet; without support, infrastructure, and capacity building, it risks becoming more of a burden than a benefit.

Internal accountability was another area of concern. While many recognised that reforms had brought in new codes of conduct and standards, there was still a strong sense that promotions and disciplinary processes were not always transparent or fair. When officers see favouritism or unclear criteria, it undermines morale and trust in the system, making it harder to bring about the cultural shifts needed for lasting change.

Community and stakeholder engagement emerged as a vital but uneven part of the reform story. Officers recognised that strong relationships with the public are crucial—not only for effective investigations but also for building legitimacy. Initiatives like *Nyumba Kumi* were generally viewed in a positive light, but several participants noted that such efforts were not always consistent nationwide. Rural communities, in particular, were sometimes left behind. This highlights the need for more inclusive and widespread outreach, ensuring that all citizens feel connected to and protected by law enforcement.

At a broader level, the study revealed institutional challenges that continue to hamper reform. Officers described bureaucratic delays, confusion over roles, and occasional overlaps with other policing units—all of which contribute to inefficiencies. These frustrations, while not new, remain real obstacles to progress.

That said, it's essential to recognise the limitations of this study. Given the sensitive nature of the DCI's work, not all participants may have felt entirely comfortable speaking openly, particularly those in higher positions. The study also focused primarily on officers and civil society representatives, and did not include voices from the judiciary, victims of crime, or prosecutors, whose insights would have added valuable depth. While efforts were made to reach a broad geographical spread, it's possible



that some remote or under-resourced areas were underrepresented. Finally, because this research was cross-sectional, it provides a snapshot in time, rather than capturing how reforms may evolve.

Even with these limitations, the findings provide a timely and valuable insight into the opportunities and challenges that arise from attempting to reform one of Kenya's most important investigative bodies. Suppose the DCI is to become more efficient, more trusted, and better aligned with the demands of modern policing. In that case, reforms must be implemented in a way that is inclusive, well-supported, and grounded in the day-to-day realities of officers and the communities they serve.

### **Triangulated synthesis of the results**

The findings from this study painted a clear and consistent picture of the strategic areas considered most vital for reforming and improving performance within the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI). The results revealed a strong convergence between the survey data and the theoretical perspectives that guided the study, particularly concerning capacity building, fair promotion, and public engagement.

The most highly rated strategies – merit-based promotions and continuous training programmes, each endorsed by 71.73% of respondents – reflect a strong belief among officers in the value of fairness and professional development. These priorities suggest that officers not only desire reform but want reform that empowers them, acknowledges their efforts, and equips them with the skills needed for modern-day policing. This aligns with what scholars such as OSCE (2018) and Dos Santos et al. (2021) have noted: that policing today requires more than just experience – it demands adaptability, critical thinking, and ongoing learning.

Also receiving strong support were transparent recruitment processes and community policing strategies (each at 57.06%), highlighting a growing recognition that legitimacy and trust are crucial elements of effective law enforcement. The desire for more openness in recruitment and a closer relationship with the public suggests that officers understand the importance of being seen not just as enforcers of the law, but as partners in maintaining public safety. These views align with studies that have linked community trust and involvement to better reform outcomes and improved service delivery (Millar et al., 2021; Gyamfi, 2022).

Interestingly, areas such as technological and infrastructural improvement (28.80%) and specialised training programmes (14.13%) received lower levels of endorsement. While these results may initially suggest a lack of interest, it is more likely that they point to challenges in implementation or limited exposure. Many officers may not yet have experienced the full benefits of technology in their day-to-day work. This is echoed in wider literature, which has shown that without proper training and institutional readiness, even the best technological investments can fail to make an impact (Engel et al., 2020). Thus, while not highly rated in the survey, these areas remain critical and may require more focused communication, sensitisation, and investment to realise their full potential.

The results also reflect an appetite for reforms that extend beyond tools and policies – reforms that address how officers are treated, how they develop in their roles, and how they interact with the communities they serve. There was a clear signal that people-centred policing, fair internal processes, and professional development are not abstract ideals, but real expectations within the DCI.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the most effective path to reform is one that is balanced and inclusive – one that builds officers' skills and morale, enhances public confidence, and gradually introduces innovation in a way that is both practical and supportive. The consistency between the data and existing theoretical frameworks strengthens the argument for a multi-layered approach to



reform—one that brings together people, systems, and structure in service of a more effective and trusted investigative agency.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the reforms aimed at enhancing the performance of the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) in Kenya have been recognised as critical to strengthening the country's law enforcement framework. The proposed strategies addressed key institutional, operational, and structural gaps that had previously hindered the agency's efficiency. Through continuous professional development, the integration of modern technology, improved legal frameworks, and strengthened accountability mechanisms, the DCI has been better positioned to respond effectively to complex and evolving criminal challenges.

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