Stakeholders' perceptions of inter-agency collaboration in offender management under probation orders in Kakamega County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Probation orders require a coordinated response from justice agencies, social services, community organisations and the local support networks that will help meet the needs of the offenders cited in the order, as justice needs are frequently accompanied by legal, psycho-social, health, family, and livelihood needs, which the probation service can only deal with in collaboration with the respondent. This study was about stakeholders' perceptions relating to inter-agency collaboration in managing offenders in Kakamega County, Kenya, under probation. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used. The study was guided by Risk-Need-Responsivity Theory and Social Control Theory. The target group consisted of 240 probationers currently under probation and 20 stakeholders working on the realisation of probation and its support. A sample of 150 probationers was selected through simple random sampling, while all 20 stakeholders were purposively selected for interviews. One hundred questionnaires were retrieved for use and all 20 key informants completed. All quantitative data were analysed in SPSS Version 20 with frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data were thematically analysed and combined with the results of the survey when interpreting it. A composite mean score of 3.97 (SD=0.87) was observed in the inter-agency collaboration. The top ratings were for support by multiple actors (M = 4.12, SD = 0.81) and knowledge of whom to contact when help was needed (M = 4.08, SD = 0.76). Sixty percent of probationers acknowledged the involvement of multiple organisations, while 75% knew where to seek assistance. Nonetheless, 51% reported a good overall probation experience while 44% reported a bad experience. Evidence collected during interviews indicated that while collaboration with courts, local administration, civil society organisations, and health and welfare services was in place, it was, for the most part, informal and personal. Lack of memoranda of understanding, well-defined referral processes, feedback systems, joint reviews of cases, adequate paid staff, transport, and information systems were considered to be significant constraints. Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that inter-agency collaboration is fairly good for offender management, but there is still a need for its institutionalisation. It calls for formal working arrangements, formalised referral systems, regular case conferencing, safe ways of sharing the information and community liaison agreements and resourcing for agencies to participate.

Keywords: Inter-Agency Collaboration, Information Sharing, Kakamega County, Offender Management, Probation Orders, Reintegration

I. INTRODUCTION

Probation is a community disposition ordered by the court on the condition that the person abides by certain conditions while living in the community and under the supervision of a probation and parole officer. It is not simply used for monitoring compliance today. Probation shall focus on addressing criminogenic needs, aiding in rehabilitation, maintaining legal family and community connections, and decreasing the chances of reoffending. Probation in Kenya is legislated under the Probation of Offenders Act; nationally, it is part of the broader agenda of less punishment and greater rehabilitation, dignity, and decongesting prisons (Probation of Offenders Act, 2022). The effectiveness of probation is thus linked to the quality of offender management. Offender management includes assessment, case planning, supervision, referral, rehabilitation, progress monitoring, and reintegration. These functions typically exceed the ability of one agency. An offender can need court, police, substance-use, mental-health, vocational and employment, family help and mediation, and community acceptance services all at the same time. The need to coordinate these needs in a manner that does not treat them as isolated institutional issues is met through inter-agency collaboration.

Community corrections requires multi-agency efforts as a prominent element of the core approach. Klaus (1998) noted that probation systems need to be linked to courts, law-enforcement services, health care professionals, welfare facilities, and the local community. The Council of Europe (2010) Probation Rules also recognise cooperation

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with other agencies as part of effective probation practice. All of these frameworks are based on the premise that agencies communicate, are aware of each other's mandates, facilitate appropriate referral of cases, and are held accountable for actions agreed. However, the proximity of several institutions on the same territory does not imply collaboration. It needs clarity, a predictable referral process, timely feedback, secure information sharing, collaboration and resources. Kenton et al. (2026) highlighted that multi-agency arrangements can be weakened when local systems are not integrated and information is not consistently shared across partners. Thus, a partnership can be in policy, but actual day-to-day reality can rely on informal telephone contact, personal acquaintance, or the initiative of an individual officer.

The Kenya Policy landscape acknowledges the need for collaboration in offender rehabilitation. The State Department for Correctional Services (2024) has demonstrated the role of inter-agency cooperation in non-custodial measures through collaboration between national government, the Judiciary, and county government. The involvement of family, community, and service providers in probation and community service was also highlighted by Penal Reform International (2016a). However, national evidence still reveals challenges to effective probation practice as unclear roles, weak coordination protocols, inconsistent referrals and lack of rehabilitation resources (Omboto, 2022).

The sharing of information is particularly vital as decisions made at each step impact other agencies. Social inquiry and assessment information is used in the consideration of the non-custodial sentences. Issues of offence, family, health and community are important to obtain so probation officers can design supervision plans. Service providers must have information to refer them to the right type of support and probation staff must have information on attendance, progress and emerging risk. In cases where these connections are less robust, offenders may be evaluated without the necessary action being initiated, referred without follow-up, or supervised without any follow-up records. Community groups are also significant inasmuch as reintegration also occurs in the communities in which the offenders reside, work, and have relationships. Social support, mediation, training, livelihood support and informal monitoring can be provided by family, employers, Faith-based organisations, community-based organisations and local administration. Social support is not a replacement for good probation practice; rather, it supports legal routines and minimises the isolation after conviction. Wigzell and Paterson-Young (2025) highlighted the role of supportive professional and social relationships in desistance, while the State Department for Correctional Services (2024) highlighted community involvement in non-custodial measures in Kenya.

Kakamega County provides a context in which these relationships can be explored. It comprises many rural communities with high population density, expanding urban areas, a significant level of poverty, and uneven distribution of social services. The probation services in the county are connected to the Kakamega, Mumias, Butere, and Butali court jurisdictions. The settings provide the ground for probation officers to interact with judicial officers, the police, local administration, county services, health facilities, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, faith-based groups, and community leaders. The central question is not simply whether those actors exist, but whether probationers and implementing stakeholders experience their involvement as coordinated, visible, and useful. The perceptions of stakeholders are crucial and can provide insight into the practical experiences with formal arrangements. Probationers may also be offered assistance that they may not be aware of being offered by which agency, or they may know the person to contact but not have access to a full provincial referral pathway. When working together, practitioners can report that even if there are no formal agreements for collaboration, there are regular case conferences. This dual analysis can then help to find common ground and shortfalls in operational cooperation and institutionalised collaboration.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Probation orders are designed to provide a balance of accountability, rehabilitative, community supervision, and reentry opportunities. Probation officers need to collaborate with the judiciary, police, county services, local administration, health providers, civil society organisations, families, and community structures in the effective implementation. This collaboration should facilitate making referrals, continuity of care, sharing of information, coordinated monitoring, and access to interventions that meet the needs of persons linked to offending. In reality, probation services in Kenya are characterised by high caseloads, inadequate transport and technology, inequitable access to rehabilitation, and poorly defined inter-agency structures. A lack of clearly defined roles and reduced coordination can lead to different institutions operating under different business rules and not collaboratively as an offender-management chain (Omboto, 2022). The National Council on the Administration of Justice (2016) also documented coordination and case-flow weaknesses within Kenya's criminal justice system, creating a risk of poor continuity across justice processes.

This is especially relevant at the county level, as national policies do not necessarily reflect the functioning of collaboration at the county office or within the local community. Kakamega County has operational probation stations and a large network of potential partners, but there is little empirical evidence on whether probationers are aware of whom to cooperate with, whether referral pathways are clear, whether information is passed in line with rules, or if there are formal procedures to guide cooperation. Supervision of local findings can include workarounds that pessimise national findings, strengths, and gaps that impact daily operations. In the absence of county-specific evidence, agencies can still envision collaboration as a policy goal, without having a clear understanding of how collaboration is experienced by probationers or encountered by frontline stakeholders. The study sought to understand stakeholder perceptions on inter-agency collaboration in the management of offenders under probation orders in Kakamega County. It targeted not only support from a number of actors, awareness of organisations involved, clarity about where

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to get support, but also looked at the wider probation experience and the institutional conditions around coordination and information sharing.

1.2 Research Objective

To evaluate stakeholder perceptions of inter-agency collaboration in offender management under probation orders in Kakamega County, Kenya.

1.3 Research Question

How do stakeholders perceive inter-agency collaboration in offender management under probation orders in Kakamega County, Kenya?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Risk-Need-Responsivity Theory

The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model is based on three interrelated principles. The Risk Principle is that the severity of the intervention is commensurate with the risk of recidivism. The need principle necessitates intervening on the factors that can change, while the responsivity principle involves tailoring the intervention to the individual's needs, learning styles, motivations, capabilities, and context (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Collaboration must take place since the probation officer, on their own, will not be able to give all of the interventions that have been deemed necessary through the processes of the assessment.

The mechanism for implementing the need principle is through inter-agency cooperation, which involves connecting an identified need with a capable service provider. Substance misuse might need a health or treatment agency, unemployment might need vocational or livelihood assistance, family conflict might need mediation, and a clinical referral dealing with mental health concerns might be required. Collaboration also contributes towards responsivity, as actions can be chosen and modified based on information gained from families, community actors, and specialist services. In the absence of referrals or return of feedback, RNR is practised only superficially, and assessment becomes separated from treatment. In a resource-limited environment, the model still has its limits. Without the availability of services that are located close to the person, easily affordable, well-coordinated, and without language barriers, etc., a precise assessment cannot be designed to suit the intervention. This constraint applies in the situation of Kakamega County, where poverty, transport challenges, and imbalanced distribution of services could impact access to support. Thus, the RNR framework was employed to assess whether or not collaboration facilitated the process of needs identification to actual services beyond the administration of referrals.

2.1.2 Social Control Theory

According to Social Control Theory, conformity is dependent on an individual's ties to conventional society. Hirschi (1969) recognised the fundamental components of these attachments to be the attachments of 'attachment', 'commitment', 'involvement', and 'belief'. Probation can enhance these aspects when it maintains family bonds, facilitates employment and/or education, commits the person to educationally productive activity, and clarifies the proper expectations.

Inter-agency cooperation is applicable as it is within a few institutions and relations that social bonds are created. While a probation officer can offer accountability, families, employers, religious institutions, local administrators, and community organisations bestow the daily acceptance and opportunities that are the stuff of reintegration. Collaboration thus expands the notion of offender management beyond formal supervision and links probationers to social networks conducive to lawful conduct. The theory also helps to explain the significance of knowing where to seek help. Having an easily accessible and trusted point of contact is an institutionalised attachment, and a disjointed referral structure undermines trust and decreases help-seeking. While Social Control Theory cannot fully explain poverty, institutional inequality, or bad social connections and networks, it is one of the lenses that can be useful in studying whether collaboration improves supportive relationships and community membership during probation.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Inter-Agency Collaboration in Probation Practice

The needs of people on probation are complex, requiring attention across a range of areas including justice, health, welfare, housing, education, employment, and family life. Klaus (1998) also showed that coordinated partnerships are essential to effective probation, since one agency alone would typically lack the power and expertise to tackle all aspects of a case. This is a policy-level argument, and, more typically, the literature reports desirable structures and not unique contributions of collaboration to offender outcomes. Kenton et al. (2026) highlighted the importance of optimising collaborative and partnership working across agencies and sectors. In multi-agency justice

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systems, fragmented mandates, limited resources, and contrasting organisational arrangements can constrain implementation. When two agencies cooperate or collaborate, there may be no formal recognition of who leads a case, of who provides a service, of when that information can be shared or released, or of how agencies are held accountable when a referral has not been completed.

In Kenya, the Probation and Aftercare Service has a formal architecture that engages with courts, police, administrators, public services, and community organisations. This network is consistent with the community-based probation and non-custodial framework described by Penal Reform International (2016a). On the other hand, Omboto (2022) concluded that the implementation of probation is still hampered by ambiguity in functions, lack of resources, and poor coordination. One may want to consider collaboration from the perspective of operational capacity and formal mandate, rather than only a policy statement. County variation adds another dimension. National frameworks can be interpreted in various ways based on how staffed, how locally led, what services are available, and the institutional relationships. Kakamega County includes multiple court and probation jurisdictions, with a combination of rural and urban residents. It could therefore reflect functional local partnerships and systemic weaknesses as found nationally. Through county-level inquiry, it is possible to determine the uniformity of collaboration, its ease of observance by probationers, and whether it is backed by institutional procedures.

2.2.2 Information Sharing, Referrals, and Case Coordination

The actual building blocks of cooperation are information sharing. A court needs to have good assessment information, probation officers need offence data and personal-history data, and service providers need good referral information to take an appropriate action. Kenton et al. (2026) highlighted that multi-agency working is weakened when local systems are insufficiently integrated and partners do not have up-to-date shared information. There needs to be fair common methods and safeguards that accompany timely exchange, or the concept of a timely exchange has no meaning. Social inquiry reports, risk and need data, referral letters, and liaising with local agencies and administrators play a significant role in Kenyan probation practice. The National Council on the Administration of Justice (2016) documented inconsistencies in information and institutional practice within Kenya's criminal justice system. Penal Reform International (2016a) also documented operational experiences within community service and probation in Kenya. While informal processes may help resolve a quick issue, the lack of comprehensiveness, different access, and a lack of continuity of such processes, if a specific officer is transferred or unavailable to help, can cause issues.

There has been an almost universal call for a solution in digital systems, but digital technologies cannot create collaboration on their own. Morris et al. (2021) showed that digitally enabled tools can support desistance-focused probation supervision, although their value depends on how they are implemented in practice. Within rural or mixed environments, a secure and functional system is therefore needed to be backed up by connections, training for staff, clear rules for how data is protected, and agreed procedures for the use of data at the institutional level. Feedback can make the difference in referral quality. The transfer of a probationer to another service does not constitute evidence that the service received, was appropriate, or completed. A successful pathway should include information on the reason for referral, work to be done, officer responsible, consent and confidentiality requirements, and how progress will be communicated. Probation officers will not be able to make use of probationers' services unless they get feedback.

2.2.3 Community and Civil-Society Participation

Community participation helps reach out of the criminal justice system. Counselling, mentorship, livelihoods support, reconciliation, and social monitoring services can be offered by local administrators, community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, families, and employers. The State Department for Correctional Services (2024) acknowledged that community engagement is crucial in non-custodial interventions in Kenya. This participation is particularly important where services are absent or far away.

This is in line with the value of community involvement, both in terms of the reinforcement of conformity and in terms of opportunities for lawful involvement. Boxstaens and Depauw (2020) demonstrated that the working dynamic between supervision practitioners and clients is a key aspect of community supervision. Ofori-Dua et al. (2015) also showed that the community service helps to keep offenders in the same surroundings and provides an additional layer of accountability. It must be understood that the involvement of the community will not always be received positively, as stigma, fear, and poor awareness of the probation mechanism may impede the reintegration of the child. CSOs have the capability to fill the gaps in service provision in the areas of vocational training, counselling, treatment of substance use, and family support. However, project-based organisations have restricted geographical reach, funding cycles and reporting ability. Such recognition of civil-society roles, realistic referral expectations, and updates about service availability help to strengthen cooperation. But relationships are purely based on goodwill, so that support can differ depending on the probation station or the probation officer.

2.2.4 Institutional Capacity and Resource Constraints

Collaboration requires time, staff, transport, technology, and coordination capacity. When a probation officer is overloaded with too many cases to monitor, they may become focused on the functional statutory reporting and checking for compliance over partnership development. A small community group might be able to give good support but not have enough administrative presence or time to attend case meetings or produce formal feedback. Omboto (2022) identified operational and resource challenges affecting probation practice in Kenya, showing that collaboration

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cannot be separated from the capacity of participating agencies. Capacity building is called for as a remedy; it is effective only with institutional arrangements. Penal Reform International (2016b) noted that probation systems require adequate staff, training, resources, and workable organisational arrangements. Without transport, communication resources, service folders, data protection, agency management for collaborative efforts, and training on referral or information sharing, the impact will be minimal.

The resources issue is also relational, too. Agencies must have the opportunities to learn about each other and demonstrate confidence. There are, however, everyday cases conferred, focal persons assigned, joint training, and regular review processes that can take personal cooperation and make it a working practice for an organisation. They allow for less focus on any specific officer and ensure continuity when officers change. However, their effectiveness needs to be evaluated, both for the services' users and for those stakeholders implementing them.

2.3 Knowledge Gap

While the literature does acknowledge the importance of inter-agency working in relation to probation, to date, there is limited empirical evidence to support this working, and it has tended to focus on a national level or on systems with high levels of resources. It states what is involved in coordination, but is limited in describing how local actors relate to referrals, information sharing, community participation, and institutional capacity. Both Kenya and worldwide studies have reported the wide-ranging issues with probation, but fewer mixed-method studies have explored the collaborative efforts at the county level from the combined perspective of probationers and the implementing actors.

The particular issue in Kakamega County was the issue of whether there was evidence of collaboration in its usefulness for probationers or stakeholders who availed formal or informal modalities and what institutional factors obstructed a coordinated offender management. This study bridged this gap by using survey data on supports, organisational involvement, contact pathways, and experiences within the probation system, as well as interview data from justice, administration, and civil society actors.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted within a descriptive framework. The study was carried out at the same time to gather respondents' data, divided into quantitative and qualitative types, analysed separately, and merged in the stage of interpretation. This design was suitable since the probationers were able to give measurable patterns on support and collaboration, and the key informants were able to share experiences on the coordination and information sharing in practice (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The questionnaire was structured for the quantitative component and semi-structured interviews for the qualitative component. Through integration, the study concluded that there was a convergence, complementarity, and divergence between the probationers' and practitioners' experiences. According to Almalki (2016), this type of integration can overcome the barriers posed by the use of a single method and give a better description of a complex institutional process.

3.2 Study Area

The study was carried out in Kakamega County in the western part of Kenya. In 2019, the county population was estimated at 1,867,579 by the census, mainly rural with the presence of emerging urban centres (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Its probation functions are related to the court jurisdictions of Kakamega, Mumias, Butere, and Butali. The county was chosen for its high probation population, socioeconomic stressors, and diverse array of justice, administrative, health, and community partners.

3.3 Target Population, Sampling, and Sample Size

The target population consisted of 260 participants, of which 240 were probationers on active supervision, and 20 stakeholders in probation implementation/reception. Stakeholders included probation officers, judicial officers, local administration officials, and NGO, CBO, and faith community representatives. Probationers were the primary survey population, as they are directly involved in the supervision and referral processes, whilst stakeholders shared insights from their institutional or professional point of view. Based on Yamane's finite-population formula, the survey sample was 150 out of a population of 240 probationers (Yamane, 1967). This was undertaken through simple random sampling, utilising the sampling frame of probationers. The selection of these 20 stakeholders was based on Patton (2015), whose roles and experience in IACP will be directly relevant to obtaining the needed information. Of the original intention of surveying 150 questionnaires, 100 were usable (66.7%), and all 20 key informants completed interviews.

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Table 1

Response Profile by Data Strand

Data strand	Targeted	Participated	Response rate
Probationer questionnaire survey	150	100	66.7%
Stakeholder interviews	20	20	100.0%

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The questionnaire structure includes quantitative tools from probationers. Items included perceptions of services received while on probation, awareness of the various organisations working in probation services, who to turn to for help if it were needed, and the overall experience of having to deal with probation. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were calculated on 5-point response scales. Where respondents needed clarification and assistance was provided, it was not directed but rather provided to assist the respondent. 20 stakeholders, from different court jurisdictions, were interviewed in a semi-structured manner, face-to-face. Agency roles, referral practices, information sharing, agency involvement with the community, resource limitations and the opportunities for better coordinated offender management were explored. The interviews were tape-recorded, with field notes, when consent was given. To guarantee confidentiality, member roles and coded identifiers were employed in reporting.

3.5 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

To determine the content validity, it was determined whether both the questionnaire and the interview guide were in accordance with the objective of the research, the questions, and the conceptual variables. The instruments were checked for relevance, clarity, and sufficiency by supervisors and experts in the field of criminology, probation, and criminal justice. The face validity was examined through the pilot testing, and ambiguous/repetitive items were modified.

Questionnaire clarity and preliminary internal consistency were achieved by using a pilot study (10 probationers outside the study area). The Cronbach's alpha for the entire set of Likert-type items was .716, which is above the .70 value generally accepted as satisfactory (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The objective-specific pilot estimate for the small inter-agency subscale was highly volatile due to the fact that there were just two items comparable to each other, and there was a limited number of participants (10) in the pilot sample. It was therefore not seen as an absolute psychometric measurement but rather was interpreted based on the entire collection of field data and confirmed with the interview data. Expert review, multiple categories of stakeholders, audio recording, multiple readings of the transcripts, and triangulation with findings of the survey supported the credibility in the qualitative category. During the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. A consistent coding process and verbatim quotations achieved dependability and transparency.

3.6 Data Analysis and Integration

The quantitative data were coded and analysed using SPSS Version 20. Response patterns were summarised using frequencies and percentages, and perceptions of the collaboration indicators were summarised using means and standard deviations. The analysis was descriptive as it was not testing a causal effect, and the objective was related to stakeholder perceptions.

Recorded interviews were transcribed and coded using the six steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher familiarised herself with the transcripts, initially coded, grouped related codes, checked and named the themes, and wrote the narrative account. Finally, quantitative and qualitative results were compared in a joint display for looking at convergence, complementarity, and explanatory links.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Data was collected with institutional approval and with a national research permit. All participation was voluntary, informed consent was secured in writing, and the approach to probationers aimed to minimise perceived coercion. The respondents had the possibility to seek answers to unanswered questions as well as withdraw without affecting their probation status. Information that revealed identity was not included in the reporting, and information was kept safe. Deliberate safeguards were put in place for the researcher's professional involvement with probation practice. The researcher’s own direct supervision group and the researcher's from the duty station were excluded. Interviews were carried out as a student researcher, with a neutral questioning approach to minimise the effect of professional influence on response.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Overall Perceptions of Inter-Agency Collaboration

The four indicators employed for describing inter-agency collaboration were first analysed. Table 2 shows support received from a number of actors, awareness of organisations taking on work connected with probation, and

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knowledge of who to approach when assistance was needed, as indirect indicators of collaboration. The composite mean reflects the overall trend in the ratings and assumes that not all the agencies or all the cases were integrated to the same degree.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Inter-Agency Collaboration and Information-Sharing Indicators

Indicator	Mean (SD)	Interpretation
Support received during probation from multiple actors	4.12 (0.81)	Effective
Awareness of organisations involved in probation work	3.95 (0.89)	Moderately effective
Knows whom to contact when help is needed	4.08 (0.76)	Effective
Overall probation experience, indirect indicator	3.74 (1.02)	Moderately effective
Composite	3.97 (0.87)	Moderately effective

Note. n = 100 probationers. The overall probation experience was treated as an indirect rather than a direct measure of collaboration. Source: Field Data, 2026.

The composite mean of 3.97 (SD = 0.87) signified the generally very good but not necessarily high rating for collaboration. The highest mean was for support from multiple actors, with 4.12, indicating that many probationers were getting support in addition to that from their probation officer. A score of 4.08 for the knowledge of whom to contact also showed positive results, showing contact pathways being relatively clear for most of the respondents. The mean for awareness of the organisations involved was lower at 3.95. The implication is that a probationer may be copying information on a contact point, or know a specific point within a network of points, without understanding all the points that are involved in the case. The total probation experience had the lowest mean and the highest variability, M = 3.74, SD = 1.02. This implies that the fact of collaboration did not mean that the experience of it was always good for all of the respondents.

The pattern reflects the RNR affirmation that criminals improve if various requirements are connected with proper services. It also, however, highlights that service connection cannot be the only component of effective offender management. Several contacts constitute an integrated plan, depending on the quality of referral, timeliness, continuity, and knowledge of the process on the part of the probationer. Klaus (1998) also highlighted the need for partnership arrangements to be translated into coordinated case management activities and not a parallel institutional activity.

4.1.1 Awareness of Organisations Involved in Probation Work

The respondents were asked about the involvement of various persons or institutions in the work of probation. 60% agreed, with 37% agreeing and 23% strongly agreeing. 35% answered with neutral and 5% disagreed. As far as multi-agency involvement was concerned, while this was evident to many probationers, the substantial neutral group suggests institutional roles were not necessarily explained or experienced directly. Analytical significance of the neutral response. Even though it takes place behind the scenes, collaboration may be achieved through court communication, administrative verification or simply through referrals that are an understood part of the probationer's regular probation work. On the other hand, neutrality can be a sign that external partners were not or very seldom involved in some instances. Thus, the obtained results differentiate operational collaboration from participants' knowledge of collaboration.

Table 3

Response Distribution for Awareness of Organisations Involved in Probation Work

Response category	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	23
Agree	37
Neutral	35
Disagree	5
Strongly disagree	0
Total	**100**

Note. n = 100 probationers. Source: Field Data, 2026.

This distinction is in line with Penal Reform International (2016a) in describing formal and community actors involved in the implementation of probation. It is also corroborated by the conclusions of Omboto (2022) that unclear role delineation can result in ‘a culture of silo mentality for doing activities that have a general rehabilitative mandate’. Probationers might not know what organisation to contact for a service, and accountability can be problematic and opportunities for self-referral limited. Findings relate to induction and case planning. Probationers should be given

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information on the agencies involved, the nature of a referral, what information will be passed on, and how they can request help. An easy-to-follow case support map, either in written form or verbally, would aid in collaboration or allow probationers to be actively engaged in their supervision plans.

4.1.2 Awareness of Referral and Support Structures

Three-quarters (75%) knew whom to ask for help when they had a particular problem. 42% agreed, and 33% strongly agreed, 11% were neutral and 14% disagreed. None of the respondents answered strongly disagree. The outcome demonstrates that the majority of probationers had at least one identifiable support contact, while one quarter had no certain or clear information in terms of their support contacts. The knowledge of a contact point is a convenient measure of the availability of access to an institution. It can foster early intervention for a probationer if they are experiencing family issues, addiction issues, unemployment or trouble with the order. According to Social Control Theory, having an accessible contact will heighten attachment to a conventional institution and help ensure that a problem will be dealt with in a lawful manner instead of avoidance and/or non-compliance (Hirschi, 1969).

Table 4

Response Distribution for Knowledge of Whom to Contact When Help Is Needed

Response category	**Percentage (%)**
Strongly agree	33
Agree	42
Neutral	11
Disagree	14
Strongly disagree	0
Total	**100**

Note. n = 100 probationers. Source: Field Data, 2026.

It is not to be taken lightly that the minority has no clear contact pathway. These individuals may be most susceptible should a crisis occur, especially if they lack literacy, transportation, the support of their families, or awareness of public institutions. The outcome would help set up clear referral directories, designated case contacts, and re-explain the services that are available and cannot be done just once at the start of probation.

4.1.3 Overall Probation Experience as an Indirect Collaboration Indicator

The overall probation experience was used cautiously as an indirect indicator because it can be influenced by various factors other than collaboration: supervision style, order conditions, personal circumstances, and community responses. 51% said it was a positive or very positive experience, 44% said it was a negative or very negative experience, and 5% were neutral. The two fairly equal subshafts demonstrate that while there were high levels of satisfaction with specific aspects of working collaboratively, there were also significant areas of dissatisfaction with respect to probation in general. This mixed pattern indicates that there is some mixed fidelity of application in either case or setting. Experiences may have varied for some probationers, from supportive relationships, clear referrals, and responsive services, to experiences of probation primarily as monitoring and compliance. Several factors confirm this interpretation: the high variance of the overall-experience mean. So it would be wrong to assume the more agencies involved, the more likely of having a rehabilitative experience.

Table 5

Distribution of Overall Probation Experience

Response category	**Percentage (%)**
Positive or very positive	51
Neutral	5
Negative or very negative	44
Total	**100**

Note. n = 100 probationers. The overall probation experience was treated as an indirect indicator. Source: Field Data, 2026.

Wigzell and Paterson-Young (2025) also highlighted the importance of caring professional relationships in desistance practice. The Kakamega results also argue that collaboration may be measured in terms of the number of partner agencies utilised, but also according to when and how such partnerships are used, whether there is a need for them, whether they make sense, and whether they are utilised respectfully. Negative experiences may indicate communication problems, lack of services, or continuity of services, even if there has been a formal referral.

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4.1.4 Qualitative Themes on Collaboration and Information Sharing

The interview data provided a better understanding of the nature of collaboration and the reasons for probationers, indicating positive support parameters and mixed overall experiences. Four themes emerged: multi-agency involvement in offender management, informal information sharing and coordination, community participation in reintegration and institutional capacity constraints. Multi-Agency Involvement in Offender Management: Offender management was consistently declared to be beyond the probation service and dealing with stakeholders. Assessment, referral, supervision, and reintegration were described as the functions of courts, police, correctional services, social-welfare departments, health providers, rehabilitation programs, employment programs, local administration, and community organisations. The following is a probation officer's description of this network:

> "*We regularly collaborate with agencies such as courts, police, correctional services, social welfare departments, healthcare providers, and rehabilitation or employment programs. This cooperation helps in sharing information and connecting probationers to needed services, which improves supervision outcomes."* (Probation Officer [KII-03], interview, 2 May 2026)

The quotation is evidence that collaboration had a knowledge-sharing and service-linking role. Furthermore, the survey mean for multiple actors' support is also high. The finding indicates support for the RNR model in that specialist organisations can provide a mechanism to meet probation's need to respond to needs that lie beyond their immediate probation supervision mandate. However, the breadth of partner agencies should not be assumed to mean that all the services were provided for every probationer. 40% also said that they no longer see multiple organisations getting involved, and 35% were neutral. Qualitative evidence thus suggests the network was present, and the survey results indicate the network's reach and visibility were uneven.

Informal Information Sharing and Coordination: Stakeholders said that there was functional cooperation in selected relationships, which was not sufficiently formalised. Communication relied a lot on personal relationships, contacts, goodwill, and initiative. Multifunctional databases, accepted referral procedures, memoranda of understanding and regular joint case reviews were not always available. A judge said the turbulent trend was as follows:

> "*The most functional channel is between this court and the probation office. Beyond that, communication among police, social services, health facilities, local administration, and community organisations appears fragmented and largely dependent on personal relationships."* (Judicial Officer [KII-12], interview, 14 May 2026)

The relatively strong relationship between the court and probation was attributed to regular interactions between the institutions regarding sentencing, social inquiry reports, and administration of orders. Things were far less predictable in the broader network. The implication of this discovery is that distances in collaboration ranged from being very good, where legal mechanisms involved regular contacts, but poorer where collaboration relied on voluntary or occasional contacts. The institutional gap was discussed in more detail by an NGO representative:

> "*Our collaboration with the Butali probation office is the most functional inter-agency relationship we maintain. It is not, however, an institutionalised partnership; there is no MOU, no formal referral protocol, no agreed feedback mechanism, and no joint case review process."*(NGO Official [KII-18], interview, 25 May 2026)

There is a distinction between cooperation and institutionalisation, as found in this evidence. A relationship may function well even if staff are in and out of the picture, but with no continuity, no consistent recording and no accountability or organisation. A lack of feedback is particularly significant as a probation officer might not be aware if a referred person has received the service or progressed at all. The National Council on the Administration of Justice (2016) similarly documented coordination challenges across agencies in Kenya's criminal justice system. While informal arrangements might be adaptive under low-resource conditions, they instigate risks. There may be limitations on access to services based on personal connections or contacts a child or young person has with an officer; records may not be complete; expectations of confidentiality may vary; cooperation may end when a child or young person moves on to the next staff member. Case review, consent, referral, feedback and record keeping should therefore be formalised in such a way that it is flexible with local relationships and provides minimum standards.

Community Participation in Reintegration: Local administrators, leaders, faith-based, and CBOs were identified as key providers of counselling, mediation, guidance and social support and monitoring. They worked in conjunction with any area where probationers resided and they provided an additional source of supervision. A local administrator spoke of an informal relationship:

> "*The working relationship between my office and the Butali probation officer is one of the more functional inter-agency partnerships in this sub-county. What the relationship lacks is any formal foundation; there is no written protocol defining what information is shared or how I report back."*(Local Administrator [KII-19], interview, 25 May 2026)

The quotation illustrates the relevance of local administration in practice and the importance of protecting information. Chiefs and other administrators may be able to describe the family circumstances and environment that impact supervision, but the information to be shared and how it should be shared should be outlined. Documentation can help make it easy to understand when information is needed, how confidentiality is safeguarded, and how feedback. Community involvement is also a part of the rationale behind Social Control Theory. Harnessing supportive family, religious, administrative, and organisational relationships can enhance attachment, commitment, involvement,

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and beliefs. However, community actors' presence does not automatically mean acceptance. Some probationers may also face stigma and organisations might not have the resources to provide ongoing livelihood or psychosocial care. It is, therefore, essential that there should be community sensitisation, community participation, and realistic service planning, as well as informal goodwill.

Capacity and Resource Constraints: Stakeholders reported a lack of staff capacity, transportation capacity, technology, time and administration capacity as constraints for joint work. Agencies may recognise a need for coordination, but not have the resources to meet, follow referrals, keep records, or develop partnerships. A community-based organisation representative was able to explain some of the difficulties being faced by both parties to the relationship:

> "*Resource constraints on both sides limit the time available for coordination. Officers are too stretched to invest in relationship-building with community partners, and we as a small CBO have limited administrative capacity to manage complex inter-agency relationships."* (CBO Representative [KII-11], interview, 11 May 2026)

This discovery accounts for the fact that collaboration might be seen and valued, but still not be administered. Coordination is labor-intensive. It involves identifying services to be provided, making referrals, gaining consent, conducting communication with partners, checking on participation, getting feedback, revising case plans, and keeping abreast of the risk. These may be limited to emergency telephone communications when staffing and/or transport is insufficient. This aligns with Omboto (2022), who identified operational and resource challenges in Kenya's probation service. It also echoes Penal Reform International's (2016b) emphasis on staff, resources, and organisational capacity in probation reform. Formal agreements that do not involve staff time or operational support would replicate the policy-practice disconnect.

4.1.5 Integrated Interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

To identify if the two data strands converged, a comparison between probationer ratings and stakeholder accounts was used. Table 6 indicates that the positive survey results were backed up by evidence of active partnerships in the interviews. The interviews also provided explanations for the less consistently positive awareness and overall experience.

Table 6

Joint Display of Findings on Inter-Agency Collaboration

Quantitative evidence	Qualitative evidence	Integrated interpretation
60% acknowledged involvement of multiple organisations	Stakeholders described collaboration with courts, police, local administration, health and welfare services, NGOs, CBOs, and FBOs.	Collaboration was operational and visible to a majority, but not to all probationers.
75% knew whom to contact when problems arose	Participants described working referral networks and familiar contact persons.	Contact pathways existed, although they were often person-dependent rather than standardised.
35% were neutral about organisational involvement	Information sharing was described as informal and roles were not consistently explained.	Informal coordination limited probationers' visibility of the wider support network.
51% rated probation positively; 44% rated it negatively	Stakeholders reported limited resources, fragmented communication, and few formal agreements.	Uneven coordination and service capacity help explain the divided probation experience.

The main central integrated finding was that collaboration was operationally present but institutionally fragile. Probationers overall felt supported and knew where to get support; there was an identification of concrete relationships between agencies on the part of practitioners. However, those ties were very much individual in nature, and missing from them were the means of continuity, consistency, and accountability. This is a finding that expands the national discussion on how weak institutional frameworks have an impact on how local practices are done. It was not that everyone walked their own way, completely disregarding the people around them. Because there was no common architecture that could support the conversion of helpful local relationships to a stable offender management system(s). This mechanism would be addressed directly through memoranda of understanding, referral templates, feedback envelope timelines, designated people to focus on, records on how to communicate securely within, and routine case conference times.

The results additionally reveal the need to view collaboration as more than simply a professional report. What may seem to be coordinated to agencies may not be coordinated to probationers. The lack of a positive response at 35% for organisational involvement and the negative overall experience at 44% highlights the need for service-user

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visibility and experience. The support plan, who the probationers are in touch with and timely and responsive referrals are more credible and can facilitate collaboration.

The integrated findings were consistent with the literature reviewed. Omboto (2022) similarly reported that probation practice in Kenya was constrained by unclear roles, weak coordination, and resource limitations, while the National Council on the Administration of Justice (2016) documented coordination and information-sharing weaknesses across Kenya's criminal justice system. Kenton et al. (2026) likewise showed that multi-agency arrangements are weakened when local systems are not sufficiently integrated and information is not consistently shared. At the same time, the visible involvement of courts, local administration, community organisations, and service providers in Kakamega corresponded with the collaborative structures described by Penal Reform International (2016a) and the State Department for Correctional Services (2024). The mixed probationer experience further supports Wigzell and Paterson-Young's (2025) emphasis on supportive professional and social relationships, indicating that the existence of multiple agencies is not sufficient unless coordination is consistent and experienced as supportive by probationers.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The overall view of stakeholders was that inter-agency cooperation was a moderately effective factor in the management of offenders on probation orders in Kakamega County. A composite mean of 3.97 showed a positive overall trend, and the ratings for multiple actors and who to contact clearly showed a positive stance. The majority of probationers knew they were a part of several organisations and where to find help. The collaboration system was not consistent, however. A significant number of probationers did not know about the organisations involved and there was an even split between positive and negative views of probation overall. Interviews revealed that court, probation, police, local administration, health and welfare services, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs and leaders of village or community groups were all involved in offender management processes, although there was little formalisation and examination of the nature of coordination was required to be established by personal relationship.

Communication with other services was sometimes fragmented, with missed MOUs, no formal referral processes, informal communication feedback, no joint case reviews, inadequate staff, lack of transport and lack of information. Therefore, inter-agency collaboration in Kakamega County was not missing but is poorly institutionalised. By re-enforcement of its role in offender management by formalising functional local relationships and making these visible to probationers and resourceful for offender management.

5.2 Recommendations

The Kenya Probation and Aftercare Service should formalise partnerships and cooperation with the Judiciary, National Police Service, county departments, local administration, health facilities, NGOs, CBOs and FBOs. The agreements should include details on the roles of the agencies, referral criteria, consent terms, feedback timeliness, confidentiality protection, and accountability system. Structured referring and follow-up tools should be utilised by probation stations. Each referral should include assessed need, requested service, responsibility for contacting, agreed date for response and feedback of outcome. Frequent case conferences should be scheduled for probationers with multiple and/or complex needs, and continuity should be ensured in case of staff changes through the use of staff focal persons.

A secure and proportionate information sharing mechanism needs to be built. Digital approaches have the potential to enhance timeliness in implementation; consideration must be taken on connectivity, training, privacy and capacity of smaller community organisations. When electronic systems cannot be immediately introduced, paper and telephone procedures should be standardised and followed.

County Government and community partners should improve accessible rehabilitation and reintegration services, including skills development, livelihood support, psychosocial support, substance use treatment and family support services. Community sensitisation must include a description of the rehabilitative intent of the probation and minimise the stigma that imposes restrictions on activities in the community. The agencies involved and who to contact for various forms of assistance should be clearly explained to the probationer. This information should be discussed at induction and checks should be made in supervision. Referrals completion, service uptake, probationer satisfaction, and post-order results should be measured in future evaluations to see if there are measurable gains in probationer compliance and reintegration as a result of the current strengthened collaboration.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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