



ASIA-PACIFIC RIGHTS AND JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Case Studies on Access to Justice by the Poor and Disadvantaged

Lessons Learned from Community Policing in India

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SUMMARY BOX

Categorization of lesson: Lessons learned from a multi-pronged initiative to support community policing in India.

Critical lessons for the sub-practice:

1. Police infrastructure and resources, or lack thereof, can play a key role in influencing police morale and effectiveness.
2. Infrastructure improvements at police stations also can play a large role in improving police-community relations.
3. Community policing initiatives with strong official support can be successful, but monitoring is important, and empowerment and accountability are important for both citizens and police.
4. Careful composition of community liaison groups is critical for success.
5. Community liaison groups can be expected to adopt further roles, often with beneficial results.
6. Power relations represent a useful framework for sensitising police personnel about gender and is also an effective springboard for teaching human rights.
7. Participant-oriented and experiential police training is most effective.
8. Lack of monitoring and evaluation must be overcome.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Police reform efforts should focus on empowering police by providing needed resources and enhancing infrastructure.
- ❖ Community involvement in policing needs to be closely monitored and CLGs and other entities held accountable for their expanded powers.
- ❖ Future police training/sensitisation programmes would benefit from adopting a role-playing, experiential orientation.
- ❖ Before starting, programme personnel must define objective, quantitative metrics to measure success.
- ❖ All initiatives should include extensive pre- and post-intervention evaluations according to predefined metrics in order to determine effectiveness.

CATEGORISATION OF LESSON

Lessons learned from a multi-pronged initiative to support community policing in India. Initiatives included training and sensitising police personnel, addressing infrastructure deficiencies, and establishing community liaison groups.

BACKGROUND

Police represent the first – and sometime only – interface between citizens and the justice system. Since the police are often the doorway to that system, their community relations efforts significantly affect citizens' ability to exercise their rights and protect their lives and property. Traditionally, police-community relations in India have been extremely poor, with antagonism, mistrust and prejudice common to both sides. These strained relations, moreover, disproportionately hurt marginalised members of the community – the poor, women and people living with HIV/AIDS – even though these are the groups most in need of police protection and services. Inability to avail themselves of police services prevents these groups from fully enjoying personal and economic security, and thus constitutes an obstacle to development.

To address this challenge, UNDP India has implemented several projects and studies aimed at sensitising police to the needs of citizens, enhancing police effectiveness, and improving police-community relations. Within the context of the Access to Justice framework, these efforts fall under the general category of capacity to provide effective remedies, with a special focus on enforcement and civil society oversight.

In 1995 UNDP had initiated a project entitled "Improving of Organisation and Management of Law Enforcement System in India." The project identified nine pilot police districts in three states (Assam, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu) for intensive, multi-pronged capacity building around community policing. The India Country Office has applied three related strategies: First, UNDP provided training to police personnel to increase sensitisation to community needs. Second, UNDP facilitated the establishment of community liaison groups (CLGs) to serve as interfaces between police and communities they serve. Finally, it identified infrastructure deficiencies that weakened police-community relations and committed resources to address them.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Lessons on Output/Outcome

Police infrastructure and resources, or lack thereof, can play a key role in influencing police morale and effectiveness.

One of the most important lessons emerging from this initiative involved addressing the poor working and living conditions faced by police in the nine pilot sites. A specific challenge to effective police-community relations was the poor attitude that many police had toward community residents and even toward their own jobs. To help understand factors that contributed to shaping police attitudes, the initiative included a study of working conditions of officers in the targeted sites. The objective was to establish minimal living and working conditions for different categories of police stations and to significantly progress in establishing those conditions.

In the course of the study, it was realised that low pay rates and adverse working conditions served as obstacles to changing police culture. In terms of priorities for addressing resource deficiencies, transportation, communications and workplace environment were most in need of improvement. The report noted deficiencies with respect to office space, children, medical facilities and stationery and equipment.

While suboptimal living and working conditions cannot fully explain or justify the attitude of some police officers, disseminating this information among members of the public, as well as state and national Government officials, was an important step in modifying citizens' perception of the police. This directly resulted in action to help address living and working conditions of police in the selected sites; the central Government placed at the disposal of the three state Governments Rs. 3,00,000 for each police station to

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improve infrastructure. In special cases where the requirements for improving police stations were likely to be costlier, additional funds have been promised.

Infrastructure improvements at police stations also can play a large role in improving police-community relations.

Whether justified or not, many citizens do not feel welcome at a police station, and therefore feel discouraged from filing reports. A significant recommendation from the infrastructure review concerned the establishment of pleasant reception rooms where police personnel would meet and interact with the public. The study suggested creating these rooms as well as offering fans, water and toilet facilities to visitors as a means of increasing the sense of goodwill between police and the community. Furthermore, the study recommended removing armed entry guards from the front of police stations to reduce their intimidating appearance. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these infrastructure and cosmetic changes helped community residents feel more welcome at police stations and contributed to positive attitudinal changes in both parties.

Community policing initiatives with strong official support can be successful, but monitoring is important, and empowerment and accountability are important for both citizens and police.

A UNDP-supported study on community policing initiatives across India revealed that community members are often eager to assist police, but that certain checks must be in place to prevent abuses. In addition, value was found in using traditional institutions such as village heads to promote law and order. The study examined several innovative community policing efforts. In Bhiwara District, Rajasthan, members of a residential colony conduct joint patrolling with police, thus facilitating communication and interaction between the two groups. In Guwahati, Assam, women formed a group called “Torch Bearers” to guard the entry and exit points of their neighbourhood at night. The initiative has been a success due largely to the support of local police. In Pratap Nagar, Rajasthan, citizens provided information to police to assist them in differentiating between permanent and transient populations, thus helping them to combat thefts. In Assam, villagers formed a Village Defence Party, where each household participates in night patrolling for four or five nights a month. Police there also have involved villagers in the protection of oil pipelines.

Selection and monitoring of participants for community policing is key to their success, as several examples illustrate. In one instance, police asked local youths to help monitor traffic violations, but abuses and bribes have undermined the integrity of the programme. Police should exercise caution in granting police powers to citizens.

At the same time, because police lacked the basic resources and infrastructure they could not perform their jobs properly, and often held negative attitudes toward the public. Empowering police with more support, equipment and money holds promise for enhancing their effectiveness with community relations.

Careful composition of community liaison groups is critical for success.

One challenge regarding police-public relations is the absence of effective, authorised bodies to facilitate such interaction. Under the auspices of this initiative, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) studied community liaison groups (CLGs) as mechanisms to provide this. To formulate recommendations, PRIA surveyed both police and community members in the nine pilot sites and studied existing CLGs.

After reviewing several options, PRIA recommended two levels of CLGs: One would operate at the municipal ward level or its equivalent in rural areas, and the other would be formed at the police stations level with representatives from each municipal ward. In India, the ideal number for ward-level CLGs is 5-15 members, the study determined, while it is 5-8 members for the police station level.

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One lesson learned is that it is very important to maintain diverse representation from a cross-section of the community, including women. Survey respondents recommended including representatives from various caste, class, religious and linguistic groups. Furthermore, individuals as well as organisations should be represented, as should sectors of the community including religious institutions, businesses and organised labour. The tenure of each representative should last 1-4 years, and frequent turnover should be mandatory to prevent power hoarding. The study also recommended that no one who has a criminal record or who is actively involved in politics should be a CLG member.

The process for CLG formation may be useful for communities in other countries: The first step involves sensitising police executives to the concept of CLGs and ensuring their support for the initiative. The second step establishes linkages with NGOs and other community organisations. Next, the community must be educated about CLGs in preparation for forming the committee. Fourth, the CLG is formed according to criteria that ensure inclusive participation from all segments of the community. Throughout its operation, external organisations must work to build the capacity of the CLG, whose work must be monitored and documented. Finally, at periodic intervals the work must be evaluated according to pre-determined guidelines and, if successful, scaled up.

Community liaison groups can be expected to adopt further roles, often with beneficial results.

Community liaison groups were initially supported in order to enhance police-community relations, but in the course of the pilot projects CLGs increasingly adopted a wider range of roles and responsibilities. At a time of religious riots in Gujarat, for example, many in Rajasthan feared that similar violence would break out there; CLGs in pilot cities in Rajasthan played an important role in quelling community divisiveness and defusing tensions. In this regard, the diverse, multi-religious composition of the CLGs was essential. In other states, community members started to use CLGs to raise issues within the domain of other Government agencies and to seek police assistance in resolving these issues. CLGs also have made forays into alternative dispute resolution in matters such as personal disputes and family quarrels. Again, however, if these type of activities continue there is a strong need to ensure that CLGs do not inappropriately substitute for official local Government, and that CLG members are properly trained and monitored in their new roles.

Power relations represent a useful framework for sensitising police personnel about gender and is also an effective springboard for teaching human rights.

Sensitisation toward gender and human rights issues is a challenge for police systems aiming to become more community-oriented. A study of such needs for police personnel in India included a training course that linked social inequalities (gender, caste, etc.) to power imbalances. This framework also extends to a broader discussion of human rights; exploring the exploitation of power imbalances thus can be a fruitful way of teaching police about gender issues and human rights.

Lessons on Process

Participant-oriented and experiential police training is most effective.

A primary challenge was developing a training course to help effect a shift in attitudes among 28 police change agents. The choice of training methodology was particularly important, given the role that traditional, militaristic training plays in forming most police officers' outlooks. A conscious decision was made to adopt a non-traditional methodology; the resulting programme was purposefully unstructured, with participants contributing to the training agenda and frequently encouraged to share personal experiences. Instead of a hierarchical structure, each participant was treated as a fully responsible member of the team. Reasonable board and lodging helped make training enjoyable.

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In one particularly effective lesson, participants were asked to adopt the persona of ordinary citizens and to lodge reports of crimes at police stations. Many were astounded at the levels of rudeness and suspicion they encountered. This real-life experience allowed officers to feel firsthand the frustrations that many members of the public routinely feel in interactions with police.

Operational Lessons

Lack of monitoring and evaluation must be overcome.

The project generated considerable outputs in terms of consultant evaluations of police conditions and surveys of police perceptions of the public, and vice versa. However, it lacked a thorough evaluation and monitoring system to rigorously assess whether it achieved its objectives. Anecdotal evidence indicates that initiatives all were helpful in improving police-community interactions, but no quantitative data exist to confirm or repudiate these assessments. The project did not involve pre- and post-pilot assessments of arrest rates, crime rates, police satisfaction, public perception of police, or treatment of women and other marginalised groups by police. While evaluating “soft variables” such as public perception of police is difficult, additional effort could have been made to establish evaluative criteria and apply them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Police reform efforts should focus on empowering police by providing needed resources and enhancing infrastructure.
- ❖ Community involvement in policing needs to be closely monitored and CLGs and other entities held accountable for their expanded powers.
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