COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING

The Asia Foundation works to bring together police and community members to create an improved local security environment in Bangladesh through Community-Oriented Policing.

The concept of human security in Bangladesh underpins the relationship between the rights, security, and access to justice that citizens enjoy and the benefits that they derive from national development initiatives. Poverty reduction is increasingly understood in terms of both the material improvements and enhanced quality of life that the poor experience when good governance and a sound public security environment enable them to take advantage of opportunities for economic and social advancement. Beyond the economic reform measures required to meet the poverty reduction objectives set by the Government of Bangladesh, improved human rights and security standards play an equally important role in stimulating economic growth, reducing poverty, and enhancing a sense of national identity and genuine voice in public affairs among the poor. For the poor, women, and other marginalized populations to benefit from economic opportunities, their basic rights must be secure in the home, community, and workplace, and they should have confidence in the commitment of law enforcement agencies to protect their rights and interests and be ready to lend their own support for safer communities.

The public security environment in Bangladesh has deteriorated in recent years, with an increase in robbery, extortion, assault and intimidation, crimes of violence against women, and extremist violence. Despite the recent decline in politically motivated crimes with the introduction of emergency rule, a widening gap in mutual understanding, trust, and communication continues to exist at the community level between police and citizens, undermining public security. A baseline study of community-police relations conducted by The Asia Foundation in 2004 found that citizens have little trust or confidence in the police and that they prefer to exhaust alternative remedies before seeking police assistance when threatened or affected by crime—a situation affirmed by subsequent research. The Foundation study found that police are perceived to have little sense of professional duty towards citizens, but that citizens in turn have little appreciation of the challenges that police face in performing their duties. These challenges include inadequate manpower, lack of professional training, equipment, and operating resources, low salaries, long hours in difficult working conditions, and other pressures and demands that distract them from their work. Tensions and misunderstandings in community police relations are exacerbated by the lack of opportunity for citizens to engage in good faith dialogue with police on issues of common interest or to reach joint solutions to issues that give rise to conflict.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY-ORIENTED POLICING?

Community-oriented policing (COP) reshapes traditional police management and operational strategies through facilitation of collaborative working relations between citizens and police, based on a problem solving approach that is both responsive to the needs of the community and sensitive to the challenges that police face in performing their duties. By creating space and opportunities for citizens and police to discuss
their respective views and expectations and matters of common interest, COP helps to make police more responsive to citizen interests. Improved police services in turn nurture mutual trust and respect between police and members of the communities that they serve, promote improved communication and collaboration, and contribute to increased public satisfaction with police services—all of which translates into safer communities.

ADAPTING A PROVEN COP MODEL FOR APPLICATION IN BANGLADESH

In 2003 The Asia Foundation launched a pilot COP program by adapting for application in the Bangladesh context a proven approach that the Foundation implemented in collaboration with local partners in Indonesia. The Bangladesh program builds on decades of Foundation support for the work of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the fields of human rights and access to justice, community legal service delivery, alternative dispute resolution, and legal empowerment. The pilot program was initiated through a three step process.

Step One—Preliminary Fact finding: Work began with a fact-finding process in which Foundation program staff convened key interviews, focus group discussions, and roundtable meetings in communities across the country. These discussions canvassed the views, experience, and expectations of police, local government officials, women’s rights activists, lawyers and judges, religious leaders, businesspersons, farmers, laborers, students, and housewives regarding the law and order situation as experienced by ordinary citizens and relations between police and members of the communities that they serve. Discussions affirmed deep concerns among police and citizens alike regarding the state of law and order in Bangladesh and the gap in understanding, trust, and mutual respect that divides citizens and police at the community level. Concurrent dialogue at the national level drew on the views, inputs, and facilitative support of senior police and government officials.

Step Two—Baseline Survey of Community-Police Relations: The fact-finding process informed the design of a baseline survey study on community-police relations that was administered among police, local elites, and ordinary citizens in Bogra, Jessore, and Madaripur Districts. The survey was designed and administered by a team of Foundation program staff, survey research specialists, and three local partner organizations—Banchte Shekha, Madaripur Legal Aid Association, and Light House—in communities in which pilot COP programs would be launched and in neighboring control communities that will serve as a comparative basis for measuring the impact of COP over time. The survey probed police and community perceptions of the law and order environment; public security issues of particular concern to the local community; perceptions of the respective values and expectations of police and citizens; existing examples of community police collaboration; present knowledge of community oriented policing; and the prospect of collaborative working relations between police and citizens. The study found that while relations and mutual respect between citizens and police were strained, both groups held common views regarding the most serious law and order issues facing their communities and a readiness to work together if COP mechanisms existed.

Step Three—Pilot Community-Oriented Policing Programs: The findings and recommendations of the baseline survey informed the design and implementation of pilot COP programs that were concurrently launched in Bogra, Jessore, and Madaripur in collaboration with the three local partner NGOs. The preliminary steps taken by the NGO partners included:

• Mapping of law and order problems of particular concern to local communities;
• Establishing trusting relations with the police and members of the community that served as the basis for COP activities;
• Introducing the concept of COP through public meetings, rallies, music, street theater, and other popular culture, dialogue with students, and simple publications;
• Selecting specific target communities as focal points for program activities; and
• Establishing local community police forums (CPF) as focal points for COP dialogue and program design and implementation.

In the third year of program implementation, CPFs have assumed an increasing leadership role in the pilot program areas, serving as facilitating agents for priority program activities that are jointly identified by community members and...
police. Through the sustained engagement of NGO facilitators in the initial years, CPFs have gradually evolved as independent forums that can sustain their operations with minimal external support. A CPF includes 20 to 25 members, whose activities are headed by a locally elected representative at the sub-district level, or by the superintendent of police at the district level. Other members include police officers, Ansars (government funded security officers of lower rank than police), and representatives of the facilitating NGO, together with school principals and teachers, businesspersons, religious leaders, representatives of women’s organizations, farmers, and other community members. CPFs meet at least once per month and more frequently if urgent law and order issues arise to which members wish to respond. Meetings focus on the present public security environment, particular issues or opportunities to which the CPF can respond, review of present COP activities, and plans for new program initiatives.

Several CPFs have established subcommittees on alternative dispute resolution that provide support in resolving conflicts that involve law and order issues or strained relations between citizens and police. Others have established community information booths from which citizens can obtain information about COP and the role and activities of the CPF and advice on specific criminal justice issues. CPF activities, many of which are undertaken on a voluntary basis, include school programs that raise student awareness of COP and address criminal justice issues of concern to young people, and community cultural, sporting, and other events in which citizens and police can interact informally and get to know one another as members of a common community. NGO partners and CPFs have established excellent working relations with the local media, which has generated informative coverage of COP activities and the benefits that have flowed from it. In addition, The Asia Foundation convenes periodic meetings of local partners to share experience, lessons learned, and effective program strategies from the different communities and working contexts in which pilot COP activities are implemented.

At the national level, the Foundation and its local partners have shared information and experience to raise awareness of and commitment to COP among police, public officials, and ordinary citizens. Through effective information sharing and advocacy efforts, proven pilot program experience has begun to help stimulate a national call for the broader adoption of COP by the police, with support from civil society, the media, and other facilitating agents. In addition, COP activities have created the foundation for establishing practical linkages for monitoring the impact of national level reform programs at the local level and for creating communication channels that will allow national criminal justice reform programs to take account of citizen interests, perspectives, and expectations at the grassroots. The Foundation continues to share relevant experience from Indonesia and other countries in the region with local partners, and to disseminate lessons learned from the Bangladesh experience through its network of field offices.

PROGRESS TO DATE

In their initial phases of work, pilot COP activities yielded encouraging results that signal a change in perceptions, attitudes, and expectations among citizens and police and a commitment to working together. NGO partners and CPF members report striking examples of progress as the gap in understanding and respect between citizens and police has narrowed. These include:

- Visible declines in crime resulting from collaboration between citizens and police in addressing drug addiction, gambling, harassment of women, and other issues of common concern.
- Participation by police superintendents and other senior officials in events organized by community members in local neighborhoods. Citizens welcome police participation and the implicit recognition of community views and interests by police officers who traditionally would only visit local communities if a crime was committed.
- Readiness of police to devote voluntary time to the formation and activities of community police forums.
- Willingness of representatives of different political parties to lay aside political differences and work together as members of community-police forums.
Police have embraced COP, acknowledging that the work of CPFs and other program activities enhance their efforts to combat crime and ensure public security, and that regular interaction with citizens has helped to improve the public image of the police and the readiness of citizens to assist the police in their work. There is an increasing demand from citizens and police in neighboring communities to expand COP programs in their localities.

**NEXT STEPS**

Encouraged by the success of the pilot program experience, The Asia Foundation and its local partners wish to expand the COP model to other communities. Foundation efforts to increase the visibility of the COP model at the national level have included strategic relationship building with current and former top police officials. These efforts have created a receptive environment for Foundation assistance and have encouraged recent directives from the Office of the Inspector General of Police to regional subordinates to implement community policing in all 64 districts in Bangladesh. With sufficient resources, the expertise developed in ensuring sustainable grass-roots acceptance and participation in community policing can be applied in support of this milestone police initiative.

Foundation experience in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the region has shown that official, top-down initiatives, however well intended, often fail to be fully effective without meaningful bottom-up engagement that cultivates community demand and involvement through informed participation. The initial focus of follow up work would include a rapid training program reaching all 64 districts to introduce police involved in community policing implementation to the successful approaches developed in piloting the COP model; and the development of a COP training module for the national police training academy. These training initiatives, providing a sound basis in the concepts, strategies and challenges of successful community policing, would lay the groundwork for follow-up initiatives to ensure effective program implementation. In the mid-term, the Foundation, working with senior officers at national police headquarters, would target one-quarter to one-third of the 64 districts for extensive community-level outreach, mobilization and facilitation assistance based on the COP model to ensure meaningful and sustainable program participation. In tandem with this effort, the Foundation would work to establish reciprocal linkages between local level COP activities and national level criminal justice reform programs; to monitor the impact of national reform initiatives on police services and security at the grassroots; and to provide channels for citizen voice in national level criminal justice reform.

**APPLYING THE COP MODEL TO ELECTION VIOLENCE**

The COP model lends itself to other program applications. As part of its comprehensive national election program strategy in preparation for the postponed parliamentary elections, the Foundation is supporting the design and implementation of a public awareness and advocacy strategy to reduce violence in the lead up to the election. Through a national network of NGO partners, the Foundation will support the establishment of *thana* level Committees for the Prevention of Violence in Elections that will involve police and other security personnel, Election Commission officials, and community members. It will also produce a handbook for police officers outlining their role and responsibilities in ensuring a peaceful and secure election environment.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ASIA FOUNDATION’S WORK ON COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING, CONTACT**

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