Helpdesk Research Report: Effective methods to improve police performance in cities and regions in developing countries

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Query: Identify examples of effective methods to improve police performance in cities and regions in developing (but not post-conflict) countries.

Enquirer: International Justice Mission

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Contents

1. Overview

Although there is a large amount of literature outlining best practice for police reform in developing countries (especially in post-conflict countries) there is little in the way of detailed city or region case studies that outline effective methods. This is mainly due to the lack of evaluation that objectively identifies certain types of police reform as having improved performance. It is also true that changes in performance may not be universally judged as an improvement, reform that is effective in one context may not be so in a different context, and police reform often takes place on a national, rather than regional or city level.

The case studies identified in this study suggest that the reason for improvements in performance has not necessarily been the use of particularly innovative reform policies. Rather there has been a political and social context which has allowed improved practices to take hold. The literature suggests the following to ensure effective police reform.

- **Sustained political and social support for reform:** Where reform has been successful there has been strong political support for reform and in many cases social pressure. This political and societal context can ensure that reform is initiated and maintained. Institutional reform is, therefore, best preceded by measures to build a political and social environment amenable to police reform.

- **Police leadership:** For reform to be effective there must be good police leadership throughout the course of reform. Characteristics for good police leadership include professionalism, competence, integrity and the ability to motivate staff.

- **Adequate resources and/or low-cost measures**: Whereas extraordinary police measures may require additional resources, a number of interventions are possible with little or no additional cost (e.g. Banerjee et al 2010, 2012). In many cases it is possible to improve police efficiency and performance with existing levels of resources (Verma, 2006).

- **Good systems of evaluation:** Effective evaluations are essential for identifying which reforms are successful before widespread implementation. In some cases, actions related to evaluation may inadvertently improve police performance, such as the case of sending decoys to register crimes in Rajasthan (Banerjee et al 2010, 2012).

The individual case studies identify the following:

- **Rajasthan, India:** This is currently the only evidence-based study on effective interventions to improve police performance. The study identified freezing personnel transfers, training in investigation and soft skills, and decoy visits as effective in improving police performance. The study suggests it is possible to improve effectiveness in a short time, without local buy-in and using low cost methods, as long as there is an environment conducive to attempting reform interventions.

- **Chihuahua, Mexico:** This case study highlights the importance of continuity in leadership, postings and policy. Despite political changes, police leadership and policy practices were largely maintained. There was a reduction in local staff rotation. This continuity has allowed the institutionalisation of important practices and improvements in performance, but accountability mechanisms must be strengthened to prevent misconduct.

- **Bogotá, Colombia:** Improvements in trust and performance in Bogotá are attributed to a lateral reform strategy. This is a political strategy that aimed to shape the political and societal context through, in this case, timely dissemination of crime statistics to the public and implementation of measures to strengthen policy accountability. These measures locked-in the reform process to ensure reform was implemented.

- **Mexico City, Mexico:** Three reform interventions were implemented to reduce police corruption with arguably marginal success. These were: an all-female traffic police patrol, a new city criminal code which increased penalties for bribery, and standing cameras to film acts of bribery.

- **Cities in Columbia and Peru:** Female officers have been assigned to traffic duties to reduce levels of bribery in Lima and other cities in Peru, as well as cities in Colombia. This has also arguably been met with some success but may not be replicable elsewhere.

- **Pakistan:** Rather than wider police reform, this case study identified a number of effective police operations. These operations were effective when there was proficient police leadership, strong political support, and adequate financial incentives and resources. Improving traffic policing requires an emphasis on equality before the law.

2. Case studies

2.1 Rajasthan, India

A randomised control trial of police reform in Rajasthan identified that among a number of different interventions attempted, three were successful, including one which was initially only intended to assess progress (Banerjee et al. 2010, 2012). A freeze on personnel transfers, training in investigation and soft skills, and decoy visits improved police effectiveness and public and crime victims' satisfaction.

In India, policing is predominately a state rather than a municipal matter (expert comments). In the Indian state of Rajasthan four types of interventions were implemented in a randomly selected group of 162 police stations across 11 districts of the state. The interventions were:

1) weekly duty rosters with a guaranteed rotating day off per week;
2) a freeze on transfers of police staff;
3) in-service training to update skills; and
4) placing community observers in police stations.

To evaluate the impact of these reforms, data was collected through: police interviews; decoy visits to police stations; and public opinion and crime victimisation surveys, taken before and after the interventions. The freeze on transfers and training, improved the police effectiveness and public image of the police whereas the other reforms showed no robust effects.

The freezing of transfers involved the prohibition of personnel transfers between police stations for those who had not been there for at least two years. The training programme had two modules: professional skills and soft skills. The professional skills module was provided for investigation officers and based on six days training at the Rajasthan Police Academy. This had a focus on improving investigation procedures such as field techniques and documentation, with an emphasis on scientific techniques. The soft skill module was given to police of all ranks who were trained for three days on improving public relations. This included skills such as communication, mediation, stress management, motivation, team building, leadership and attitudinal change.

For the decoy visits, surveyors attempted to register crimes at police stations. The surveyor did not disclose their identity except in situations where it seemed that the police would actually register the case (to avoid registering a false case, which is illegal), or if the situation otherwise required that the surveyor disclose his identity – for instance, if the police

threatened to prosecute him for filing a false case. These visits were initially conceived as a method of data collection to monitor progress, but also had a positive effect of their own on police behaviour.

One of the key conclusions from this study is that it is possible to improve the effectiveness and public image of police in a very short time, using cheap and simple interventions. Reducing the transfers of police decreased citizens' fear of the police and increased the satisfaction levels of crime victims. Training police staff in investigation techniques and public relations skills likewise increased the satisfaction of crime victims. These interventions also appear to have a real impact on the actions of the investigating officers, causing them to arrest more suspects and take more actions subsequent to the reporting of a crime. Practical police reform is possible, the police system is not completely resistant to change and public opinion can be improved in the short-term.

Another key conclusion is that though the other reforms failed to produce positive improvements this may be due to lack of implementation rather than conceptual flaws. There was support for the interventions from the senior police leadership, but specific incentives for the implementation of reforms were not incorporated into the design of the interventions. As the local staff bore the short-term costs, it may have been that the police station staff stopped conducting the interventions in full, perhaps going so far as to falsify community observer records. The lack of local buy-in did not affect the training or the decoy interventions, which were monitored and implemented independently of the local staff.

The authors also emphasise the general importance of a crime victimisation survey, to be conducted periodically by an independent agency. This can help identify the types of crimes that are particularly problematic, as well as helping identify appropriate policy measures to respond to them.

2.2 Chihuahua City, Mexico

Sabet (2009) examines a case study of the Municipal Department of Public Security (Dirección de Seguridad Pública Municipal, DSPM) of Chihuahua City, arguing that it represents one of only a handful of success stories in Mexican policing. The author concludes that the reason for Chihuahua's relative success has been a level of continuity in leadership, postings and policy.

Although the DPSM has been successful in implementing and institutionalising policies that have increased the professionalism of the agency, this is not because it simply selected correct or particularly innovative policies. The reason for the success is that the department was able to successfully implement and institutionalise these policies and this has been due to continuity. The DSPM has experienced an unprecedented degree of continuity. For example, Raúl Grajeda Domínguez headed the municipal police force from 1998 to 2004, outlasting an administration change. Continuity has also occurred within the ranks of the police itself. Since legal reforms in 1993, the chief operations officers have come from within the ranks of the DSPM, ensuring that operations benefit from both institutional memory and local knowledge. Police statutes passed in 2001 allow for a slow progress up through the ranks.

There has been continuity in police-citizen interactions. Though Mexican police had often been rotated regularly as an anti-corruption mechanism, Chihuahua's police have maintained their patrols in the same communities over longer periods of time. This has allowed the police to develop a relationship with the citizens they are protecting, gain the trust of the community, and develop local knowledge about crime problems. Citizens also are better able to monitor individual officers in their neighbourhood.

Finally, and most importantly, there has been continuity in policy. For example, the process for accreditation continued despite changes in chiefs, mayors and governments. Though mayoral candidates criticised the accreditation process started by the incumbent mayor, they continued the process once in power.

The author concludes that allowing for the continuity of good personnel, good policies, and good ideas can allow for virtuous circles and evolutionary professional development. However, there must be stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that the continuity does not allow misconduct or corruption.

2.3 Bogotá, Colombia

Moncada (2009) argues that between 1995 and 2006 the police in Bogotá were transformed from a poorly regarded state institution to one that enjoyed significant public trust, and this is due to a strategy of lateral reform. Lateral reform is a political strategy that involves a sequence of policies to shape the societal context within which police reform occurs, in this case to increase citizen support and participation in the reform process over time. This was done in Bogotá through two key steps: 1) the early dissemination of crime statistics to the public; and 2) the implementation of measures to strengthen police accountability to both the state and society.

The dissemination of crime statistics locked-in police reform and citizen security initiatives from backtracking due to a decrease in pro-reform political will. A Unified Information System on Violence and Crime was established to coordinate among the different institutions across which crime data was scattered and to disseminate the resulting data through monthly newsletters, press conferences with the mayor, community briefings and presentations, and media releases. Moncada (2009) attributes the importance placed on crime and citizen security by the city mayor to the release of this data. Systematising and disseminating crime statistics provided an important political resource to communities and the media that also prevented future political incumbents from reversing or abandoning reforms.

Police accountability to the state was strengthened through a revision of the police's code of conduct. Police accountability to society was enhanced by outreach to specific populations that had been previously estranged from the police and through community policing. Moncada (2009) argues that a reformist mayor made strategic use of the public's increased capacity and willingness to hold the police accountable to successfully execute these measures. He also notes, however, that the Bogotá police are still not entirely or indefinitely accountable to the state and society.
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Moncada (2009) emphasises the importance of situating institutional reform within a political strategy. Challenges in increasing police accountability may be mitigated through political

agency. Lateral reform, with a specific sequence of political policies can generate the societal context within which reform can be carried out.

2.4 Mexico City, Mexico

Anozie et al (2004) identified three reform interventions that were judged to be marginal successes in reducing the overall level of corruption within the police force in Mexico City. These were an all-female traffic police patrol, a new city criminal code which increased penalties for bribery, and standing cameras to film acts of bribery. The authors conclude, however, that such uncoordinated reforms targeted at only one specific form of corruption cannot adequately address the culture and public perceptions of police corruption. Instead, a comprehensive anticorruption strategy is required.

All-female traffic police

A 950-strong, all-female traffic police patrol called 'Cisnes', or 'Swans' in English was established in 1999. The underlying rationale was the belief that women would be less corruptible. The Swans only deal with traffic tickets and have issued more than three times as many traffic tickets as male traffic police officers over a similar time period. Anozie et al (2004) conclude that the Swans may have been able to exploit their gender identity and the cultural and social expectations regarding women as incorruptible.

New criminal code

A new criminal code for Mexico City began in February 2003. The code increased penalties for drivers and police officers who commit bribery, and prescribed prison sentences of six months to three years or fines equivalent to between US$ 400 and US$ 2000 for motorists who offer bribes. For police officers who accept bribes, the code established prison sentences of one to four years for bribes under US$ 2000 and up to nine years for greater sums.

Standing cameras

One hundred seventy-two standing cameras and mobile units were installed at strategic points in Mexico City to catch citizens and traffic police officers engaging in bribery. In the first month of the programme, all major television networks aired footage of one motorist paying two police officers a small bribe for a parking violation. As a result, the motorist ended up paying US$ 1800 in fines and received a high-profile public shaming.

2.5 Cities in Columbia and Peru

Interviews were conducted in Lima, Peru and with Columbian experts on policing (USAID 2007). The interviews reported that female officers were assigned to traffic duties, which was reportedly met with some success in reducing complaints of bribery. The authors of the report conclude that despite the relative success of such an approach the replicability and sustainability of such approaches in varied settings is as yet unproven.

2.6 Pakistan

Rather than wider reform, Abbas (2009) identifies a number of police operations that were felt to have been effective. There were two operations: an operation against some militant elements associated with the Muttihada Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi in the mid-1990s, and the anti-sectarian operations in Punjab (largely against Sipah-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi) between 1997 and 1999. The author identifies the following factors as having played a crucial role.

- **Leadership:** the operations were led by senior police officers who were highly respected for their professionalism, competence and integrity. Their motivational leadership played an important role.

- **Political support:** political leadership from the Bhutto and Sharif governments fully supported the police action. However, this also led to human rights violations, as officers involved assumed that as they acted in the interest of the state, they were 'above the law'.

- **Financial incentives:** special financial packages were offered to the officials involved.

- **Extra resources:** team leaders were provided with extra non-auditable resources for gathering intelligence information and investigations.

Abbas (2009) argues that reforms to the National Highways and Motorway Police were also a success story. The reforms were based on adoption of international standards and the factors attributed to its positive image and success are: top level political commitment, effective leadership, better wages and conducive work environment, and an emphasis on equality before law – 'if you are driving over the speed limit, you will get a ticket irrespective of who you are'.

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Additional information

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