

## **Research Summary #17 - Co-Producing Citizen Security: the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee in Karachi**

By Mohammad O. Masud (2002)

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### **Introduction**

This case explores the role of the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) in Karachi, a private organisation run by the local business community which has been directly involved in providing intelligence services and support to the police since 1989. The CPLC is a highly unconventional arrangement which violates normal principles of separating public and private interests in a core area of public business. It has brought much needed technical expertise, social credibility and private sector resources into policing. It works largely through informal institutional arrangements which have so far ensured that the private actors providing resources do not abuse their power for personal or political gain.

### **What is CPLC? A Brief Profile**

Karachi is Pakistan's largest city and its commercial capital. In the late 1980s and mid 1990s there was a significant escalation in political violence and organised crime, including kidnappings which targeted wealthy business families. This prompted the federal government and business community to take action. Both had an interest in improving security to protect the city's economy and the safety of its business elites (60% of federal revenues come from Karachi).

The police were widely seen as politicised, inefficient and corrupt. In 1989, the provincial Governor (a federal government appointee) set up citizen-police committees in four police stations in Karachi. Originally modelled on British 'neighbourhood watch committees', the CPLC has evolved from being an oversight body to becoming directly involved in fighting crime. It operates an extensive computerised database, initially covering stolen vehicles but later extending to collecting and analysing crime data for the whole city. It provides direct assistance with kidnappings, and facilitates citizen access to police services (e.g. for initial reporting of crimes). It is credited with improving police performance through provision of prompt and reliable information, better spatial crime analysis which assists effective deployment, and better procedures and internal monitoring. Although an elite organisation, these improvements do benefit poorer citizens.

The CPLC has enjoyed support from successive Governors (the top tier of the CPLC is located in the Governor's office). It operates under a flexible legal framework which has provided it with legitimacy without constraining its evolution. In practice, institutional arrangements revolve around informal relationships rather than formal contracts. For example, by law the governor appoints CPLC members, but he acts on the basis of CPLC nominations. Membership is limited to forty persons, mostly affluent members of a small, ethnic minority business community who have no evident political affiliations. They are all volunteers, are expected to make significant personal inputs of time, and to be available at short notice. They are assisted by a small professional staff, located in the five

district police offices as well as the Governor's office. The CPLC raises significant contributions in cash and kind from public donations and thus has considerable financial autonomy. The federal government contribution had dwindled to 20% by 2000.

### **Why is CPLC Successful?**

A combination of common interests, careful institutional design and informal relationships all contribute to the success of the CPLC:

- (1) The police cooperate with the CPLC because they value its expertise and practical support (for example, access to computerised crime databases). They also gain some respectability by association, and a measure of protection from political intervention.
- (2) CPLC has built a long term relationship of trust with the police, helped to improve poor working and living conditions, and made a point of not criticising them publicly, or claiming credit for successes. There are informal but strictly observed reporting arrangements.
- (3) CPLC has enjoyed the support and protection of the provincial governor and federal government, but has maintained its financial and operational autonomy (for example over the nomination of new candidates for membership).
- (4) The CPLC builds on strong informal ties of reputation and mutual obligation within the business community. Membership has a high status, nominations for membership are strictly controlled, and there is a powerful code of behaviour which is rigorously enforced to protect the organisation's reputation. .
- (5) Because politicians, public servants and journalists are not eligible to join the CPLC, they tend to constitute a critical 'countervailing elite' that is continuously scrutinising the activities of the organisation and looking for weaknesses. This helps keep the CPLC on its toes.

### **Conclusion**

The CPLC does not fit within any existing category of contracting out or public private partnership. Yet it is a long term, highly institutionalised arrangement which appears to work, and brings significant private resources and expertise to support a vital public service. There are clearly risks involved in direct engagement of this kind by private interests in a highly sensitive area of government business, and there is no suggestion that CPLC is a model to be followed elsewhere. But the case does point to the possibility that unorthodox arrangements may sometimes offer the best available solution in very difficult circumstances. It suggests the need not to dismiss these as irregular, but to understand why they work, and to consider whether they provide ideas about unconventional approaches which might be useful in other circumstances.