SELECT FINDINGS

Community policing through bicycle patrolling in Sri Lanka: An incipient post-conflict strategy

December 2014

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Key messages

- Histories of colonialism and conflict, as well as centralised institutional structures and social cleavages have shaped community policing in Sri Lanka.
- While the key objectives of improving police–community relations and reducing crime are shared by different actors, emphasis varies.
- Community policing and bicycle patrolling are increasing trust at the local level, making people feel safer and enabling local problem-solving. However, they are not yet transforming broader policing culture.
- The effectiveness of community policing is limited by challenges such as the isolation of community policing from wider policing functions, under-trained recruits and linguistic difficulties.

1. Introduction and methods

In May – June 2014 The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) undertook a case study of bicycle patrolling as part of wider community policing in Sri Lanka under the 'Securing Communities' project at ODI. The full case study was not able to be published publically, so here we present selected findings of the case study, in order to begin to fill the gap in the literature on policing in Sri Lanka.

The case study aimed to understand the role of bicycle patrolling within the broader context of community policing in Sri Lanka and to examine how it has developed, its objectives, effects and ongoing challenges.

Fieldwork was undertaken over three weeks in the capital of Colombo and in Matara District in the Southern Province and Vavuniya District in the Northern Province. Given the divergent experiences of conflict and policing in the North and South, it was crucial to capture both (see map below). Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with SLPS officers, staff at police training centres, academics, Civil Security Committee (CSC) representatives, government officials and civil society organisations. In total, 30 people participated in semi-structured interviews and 58 people participated in focus groups.

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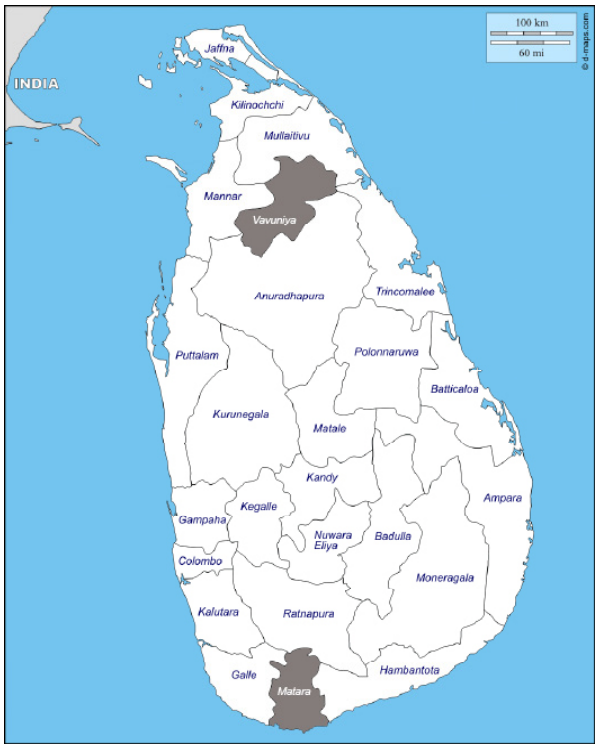
Figure 1: District map of Sri Lanka



While every effort was made to ensure objectivity of the research, given that the research could only be conducted with approval of the Ministry of Law and Order, this has shaped the findings. It is also important to note that policing is a complex subject in Sri Lanka and the constraints within which research must happen is therefore challenging. Despite this, the case study makes important inroads to researching policing in Sri Lanka.

2. Context

A number of contextual factors have influenced the development of community policing in Sri Lanka.

2.1 History of state formation

Sri Lanka's Portuguese, Dutch and particularly British occupation (ending in 1948) has invariably shaped policing in the country. The Police Ordinance introduced by the British in 1865 remains largely unmodified to this day, although there have been calls for proposals to amend it in 2014 (Dep 1969; TISL 2006: 25). Thus, while colonialism has ended, the SLPS and policing culture was fundamentally shaped by the British colonial model of policing, and continues to be influenced by it.

This colonial legacy has historically oriented the SLPS towards protection of the state and maintenance of public order, rather than the protection of, and interaction with, citizens (Olander 2007; Fernando 2009). The police have typically viewed the community as a threat, rather than as the primary recipients of protection. Despite attempts since the 1950s to usher in more community-sensitive policing (see Rajasingham 2002: 19-20), police officers are still primarily socialised to be reactive to crime rather than to prevent it. The organisational structure of the SLPS reflects this history, exhibiting centralised control through a hierarchy that eliminated links between police and the larger community (Fernando 2003; 2005; 2009).

2.2 History of conflict

A more militarised style of policing has been exacerbated by years of conflict in Sri Lanka. The most violent of these was the 26-year civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) (Höglund and Orjuela 2011; Fernando & Moonesinghe 2012). However, a number of other conflicts, such as armed uprisings in the south by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the early 1970s and late 1980s, have also played an important role in the conflict mentality that has shaped Sri Lankan policing (Fernando & Moonesinghe 2012).

During the conflict, the police played a supporting role to the military. As counter-insurgency became a major security preoccupation in response to LTTE threats, the role of the police became more militarised and its role in providing security to local populations was reduced. Lines between the military and police became blurred, with the SLPS Special Task Force established in 1983 to support military operations against the LTTE and police officers in conflict areas heavily armed. Intelligence-gathering to prevent potential insurgency attacks displaced crime solving as the central preoccupation of the SLPS. Surveillance of the local populations' movements, use of force, arbitrary detentions, road checkpoints and aggressive methods of obtaining information became common forms of interaction between local populations and the police service. This generated fear of the police by local communities. For their part, police officers were equally suspicious and fearful of local communities given regular LTTE attacks. During this period, there was thus an almost total absence of civilian policing, particularly in the north and east.

Another effect of the conflict was the increased demand for police officers to aid the war effort. In a bid to increase recruitment, standards for entry were significantly lowered and training of recruits was reduced to a period of two and a half months. Between 1983 and 2009, the size of the SLPS increased sharply – 68% of the existing SLPS were recruited during this time. The recruitment of

large numbers of undertrained and underqualified personnel into the police in a fragile security environment led to a policing culture more readily accepting of tough policing methods (Höglund and Orjuela 2012). Not only did this compromise the development of a professional police service, but the association of the police with the military meant that police–community relations were particularly strained.

2.3 Inequalities and social cleavages

Policing in Sri Lanka has been shaped by social cleavages and inequalities that exist within society more broadly. Structures of power within communities are based on a number of inequalities, including regional, ethnic, religious, caste and gender divides. These influence the make-up of the police, as well as how policing is experienced by different parts of the population. Moreover, these cleavages are also reflected in the attitudes of the police, as well as the constitution of the CSCs, which are a core element of community policing at the local level. The effects of community policing, therefore, are likely to be dependent on the power dynamics within particular communities.

Economic indicators show that Sri Lanka has recorded consistent growth rates over the past decade[1], however this has been concentrated in Colombo and the Western Province, with the north and east lagging behind in terms of income, education and health outcomes (Fernando and Moonesinghe 2012: 3). The Northern Province's population was disproportionately affected by the civil war, and an estimated 90,000 people still live in IDP camps or with host families (Saparamadu and Lall 2014). The damage to education systems has meant that in the north and east young adults, whose key years of schooling were disrupted by conflict, can struggle to find employment. One senior police officer told how a recruitment drive to attract Tamils to join the SLPS at the end of the war found many applicants could not pass basic entry examination, meaning that the highly skewed ethnic composition of the SLPS continues – with Tamils representing less than 0.5% of the service. This has important language implications, with the SLPS struggling to communicate with Tamil and Muslim groups who do not speak Sinhala as a first language (if at all).

Caste is recognised by both Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups,[2] however Hindu Tamils have a more deeply embedded caste system, making discrimination especially prevalent in the north and east where the Tamil population are more concentrated (Silva, *et al*. 2009). Particularly at the lower entry ranks, policing is considered by Tamils to be a lower caste occupation, with the implication that the majority of Tamil police officers (albeit a very small component of the SLPS more broadly) at the station level tend to be from lower or lower-middle castes. Interviewees highlighted the challenges this creates for Tamil officers when caste discrimination can prevent Tamils from reporting crimes to them. Such dynamics make it particularly challenging to build relationships between police and communities.

Sri Lanka's predominant religion, Buddhism, is practised by 70% of the population and the majority of the Sinhalese population. Other religions include Hinduism (13%), Islam (10%) and Christianity (6%) (GoSL 2012). Hinduism is associated with the majority of the Tamil population centred in the north and east of the country, and Muslims are understood as a distinct ethnic group concentrated on the south-western coast and in the east (McGilvray 2011). Sinhalese nationalism is inherently linked with Buddhism, and Buddhist religious authorities are powerful both at national and local levels. Religious tensions have heightened since 2011, at times inflaming religious divides in the country, primarily due to the rise of aggressive Buddhist nationalist organisations targeting violence towards Muslim communities (Martin 2013; Hume 2014).

Despite ongoing efforts to increase the recruitment of women into the SLPS, only 10% of the force is comprised of women officers, many of whom are concentrated in lower ranks and in administrative roles. Currently, specialized trainings on sensitivity towards violence again women, are not included within the basic training curriculum for police recruits. This, however it beginning to change with the belief that including such training within the curriculum, and increasing women's representation within SLPS would contribute towards more effectively and sensitively addressing issues of violence against women (SLPS 2012c).

These continuing regional, ethnic, religious, caste and gender barriers can engender distrust among communities towards the police and pose a challenge to post-conflict police–community relations, particularly in the north and east of the country, where discrimination is more keenly felt.

1 From 2004 to 2013 Sri Lanka averaged an annual GDP of 6.5% (World Bank national accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files).

2 There are three parallel caste systems in Sri Lanka: Sinhala, Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian Tamil.

2.4 Post-conflict environment

The contemporary context in Sri Lanka has important influences on policing, emphasising centralised decision-making.[3] Two political parties have dominated the landscape in Sri Lanka since independence: the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP). The current President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was first elected in 2005 and following his government's victory over the LTTE in 2009, was re-elected for a second term in 2010 as head of the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), a political alliance of which the SLFP is a key member.

Since the end of the civil war, the UPFA has strengthened its leadership with a two-thirds majority in Parliament, giving it greater legislative power. In 2001, the 17th Amendment made provision for the appointment by a Constitutional Council of an independent National Police Commission (NPC) with the power to appoint, promote, transfer and discipline all police officers apart from the IGP, and mandated the establishment of a public complaints procedure (Fernando 2009: 83). However, in 2010 the 18th Amendment gave the right of appointment of these Commissions to a parliamentary council whose nominations were ultimately ratified by the President, including the position of IGP (Fernando 2009; Law and Society Trust 2010). The challenge of devolving power away from the centre is reflected in Sri Lankan policing structures, with limited decentralisation of power to police officers at the local level. Given that the decentralisation of control by involving community members as partners in public security is a generally accepted element of community policing, this represents an important challenge (Denney and Jenkins 2013: 8).

3. Development of community policing

The foundations for community policing practices, including bicycle patrolling, have a long history in Sri Lanka[4]. Discussions took place as early as the 1950s between IGPs and senior officers about how the SLPS could be professionalised and a community focus introduced (Rajasingham 2002: 19-20). However, despite an increasing recognition of community policing as a philosophy within the SLPS during the 2000s, community policing has never been formally integrated into the broader national security framework as a strategic objective and political support has been limited. While there has been progress in implementing community policing, much has been left to individuals. As a result, its implementation has been inconsistent – across and within functional levels – so that community policing initiatives have tended to be isolated activities rather than force-wide.

Key initiatives include:

- The SLPS adoption of the 'Sri Lankan Police Road Map – Enhancing Capacity of Civilian Policing in Sri Lanka' in 2003.[5]
- International police training and cooperation to senior ranking police officers from 2005 onwards.
- Collaboration with the Scottish Police College since 2007 to implement community policing principles leading to the adoption of the five-year Strategic Implementation Plan for Community Policing in March 2011.
- Establishment of the Community Policing Unit in 2007, placing responsibility for community policing in the hands of officers assigned to the Unit; and assigning police officers to grama niladhari (GN) divisions across the country.[6]
- Civil Defence Committees (CDC) set up at the GN division level in 2008 to provide a forum through which citizens could share information with the police to assist in counter-insurgency during the war. After the war, to reflect the transition from intelligence-gathering to crime prevention, these were changed to Civil Security Committees (CSCs) (see Box 1).
- Partnership with the Foundation to 142 police stations across nine provinces, including through Tamil language training since 2006 and support to CSCs and nicycle patrolling since 2012.

Through the various processes and forms of support outlined above, community policing has quietly emerged within Sri Lankan policing. Because much of this development occurred during the war years, it was not always a high priority within the SLPS, however as peacetime policing takes hold, community policing has more of an opportunity to influence the nature of Sri Lankan policing.

3 Sri Lanka's political system has historically been centralised. This can be seen in the committee system of government in 1931; the cabinet with mechanisms of checks and balances in 1947; and the introduction of an executive presidential system in 1978. The only deviation has been the 13th Amendment, which made provision for the devolution of powers to provincial councils.

4 Departmental Order No. B14 sets out the regulations for the allocation, use and maintenance of bicycles to police stations and to this day it is mandatory for PCs to pass a bicycle proficiency test in order to graduate from police training college.

5 Facilitated by the Swedish National Police Board.

6 A *grama niladhari* division is a sub-unit of the divisional secretariat, and is the administrative unit in Sri Lanka. It is headed by the village headman known as the *grama niladhari*.

Box 1: Civil Security Committees

CSCs exist in each GN division, consisting of 25 to 30 members. A religious leader acts as adviser, the principal of the school (or equivalent respected community member) as chairman, the village headman as secretary and a police officer as convenor. Other members include community leaders (such as youth, women and elder representatives), government civil servants (such as agricultural officers and health workers) and local government officers who volunteer and are accepted by the Committee members. CSCs meet regularly to discuss problems in the community with the goal of finding local solutions.

Source: SLPS 2012a

4. Objectives of community policing

Improving police–community relations, local problem-solving, and crime reduction/control were routinely mentioned as objectives of community policing by all respondents interviewed for the research. However, in practice, the emphasis varied for different actors and multiple meanings are often ascribed to community policing.

4.1 CSC representatives

For the most part CSC representatives saw community policing as a mechanism for improving trust and building relations between the police and local communities. There were two key aspects to this.

First, in both the north and south, community representatives spoke of the CSCs as a way to alleviate reliance on the SLPS; limiting contact with the formal policing structure of the state in favour of community level processes to resolve local issues. Community representatives saw the use of community policing as a local problem-solving and dispute-resolution tool which, as well as dealing with crime and security issues, could also deal with perceived social and moral threats to community norms (such as alcohol and substance abuse and domestic violence).

Second, CSC representatives referred to bicycle patrolling as a means of ensuring greater police presence to deter crime and thus ensure the safety of the community. In both Matara and Vavuniya the use of bike patrols was highlighted as a means of deterring criminal or antisocial activity (for instance by undertaking night patrols when street lighting is broken, preventing youths from congregating outside schools, etc.) and accessing otherwise remote and difficult-to-reach places. In Matara bicycle patrols enabled police officers to stop and talk to the public more easily and in Vavuniya, a predominantly urban location where bikes are more often used to patrol town centres, the emphasis was placed on identifying suspicious activity and providing a greater police presence.

4.2 Sri Lanka Police Service (SLPS)

From the perspective of the SLPS, the formal objective of community policing is to enhance community safety by identifying and addressing underlying causes of crime and involving communities as stakeholders in finding solutions (SLPS 2012a: 5; SLPS 2012b: 8)[7]. A critical element of this is the expectation that community policing will increase information flows to the police, helping them to better respond to crime and improve police–community relations.

In practise most police officers (at all ranks and levels) see bringing the police closer to the people and improving police-community relations as a key objective of community policing. However, there is a variation in the perception of what these improved relations will achieve. The police we interviewed saw improved relations as leading to better intelligence gathering and strengthening surveillance as a means of maintaining law and order. For instance, many local level police officers indicated that improved police–community relations gives them greater capacity to observe the population, at the same time as it reduces community members' reliance on police services. Bicycle patrols are highlighted as a key practice of community policing in this regard. The increased visibility and accessibility to the public they give is considered a critical tool for preventing crime and gaining the trust of local populations (SLPS 2012a). This is considered to be of particular value in rural settings, giving the police increased access to difficult-to-reach areas and enabling them to control and prevent crime (SLPS 2012b: 21). The SLPS thus view bicycle patrolling, and community policing more broadly, as a mechanism to support national security by reducing crime and violence, through greater visibility and citizens

7 These objectives are stated in the SLPS training manual on community policing (SLPS 2012b) and the SLPS implementation plan for community policing (SLPS 2012a). The SLPS training manual recognises that community policing can mean different things in different contexts and so does not offer a single definition of community policing or propose a strict set of community policing procedures. However, it identifies problem-solving and building partnerships as key pillars of a community policing approach. The strategic implementation plan for community policing in Sri Lanka (SLPS 2012a) commits the SLPS to ensuring that 'police officers at all levels will be encouraged to proactively engage with communities and other organisations in order to enhance community safety [and] will work with communities to identify their priorities and concerns and establish relevant partnerships to seek solutions, wherever possible'.

informing police of potential threats. In the north in particular, reporting of illegal possession of weapons and insurgency activity were mentioned by police as objectives of the CSCs.

Although some senior police officers indicated that community policing is a way to help move the SLPS away from the legacy of traditional policing and towards a more proactive and community-oriented culture, this was not widely articulated. Moreover, at the national level there is a tendency for community policing to be perceived as a form of community outreach work or a policing public relations exercise.

4.3 Development partners

While development partners (such as BHC and SIDA) share many of the objectives espoused by both the police and the CSC representatives, such as improving police–community relations and increased community participation in local security, they also have broader expectations of what community policing can achieve. This focuses on issues such as improvements in the rule of law, accountability, reconciliation and state–society relations and addressing human rights concerns within the police (FCO 2014).

The Foundation aspires to some of these more transformational goals but is also realistic about what is practicable in the context in which they are working. So while its objective of supporting community policing is to improve state–society relations as a means of bringing about sustainable peace and stability in the long term, the practical focus of its operational support is to facilitate greater contact and consultation between police units and community members in the short to medium term.

5. What does community policing entail in practice?

Since Sri Lanka officially adopted a community policing strategy in 2007, a number of structures and processes have been created within the SLPS.

5.1 The SLPS and community policing training

Since 2011 formal community policing training has been a mandatory component of the basic police training curriculum at the Sri Lanka Police College.[8] However, interviews with police and lecturers responsible for this acknowledge that, in practice, community policing as implemented at the local level differs markedly from the theory. Although police officers typically 'know what community policing is,' they do not necessarily understand the underlying principles and strategies that community policing involves (such as community participation and problem-solving). Training remains theoretical with limited practical training in areas such as developing community partnerships. Moreover, even when recruits do comprehend the importance of proactive policing methods, their understanding of the communities in which they work is typically not sufficient for them to apply such methods.

Tamil language skills have been an important component of community policing training, with the National Police Academy training over 4,500 Sinhalese police officers since 2010.[9] Yet although graduating officers are deployed to regions of the country where their language skills can be utilised, in practice, it has proved challenging to ensure that Sinhalese officers attain sufficient language proficiency to be practically useful.

This gap between the theory of community policing and the reality of daily professional life for most junior and inspectorate ranks is to a large extent the result of the operating environment in which community policing is implemented. In particular, the traditional style and hierarchical organisation of the SLPS provides police officers (at all levels) with limited space and incentives to apply their knowledge of community policing.

5.2 Community Policing Unit and associated officers

Since 2007, CPUs have been formally created at all operational levels of the SLPS. In Matara and Vavuniya CPU officers are responsible for coordinating community policing activities and developing partnerships with the community through CSCs. In both research sites individual PCs have been assigned to GN divisions where they are expected to work in their respective villages, interacting and building relations with community members, in a wide variety of community policing activities including:

- Community work such as cleaning roads, public health works (eradication of invasive plants, prevention of dengue and setting up mobile health clinics), as well as supporting community activities (such as religious, cultural and sporting events) and providing

8 In addition, a diploma course in community policing and a one-month advanced diploma course in community policing have been made available at the National Police Academy.

9 In 2010, the SLPS commenced a five-year project coordinated by the National Police Academy to teach Sinhalese police officers Tamil through a five-month residential programme at three in-service institutes: Mahiyanganaya, Kalutara and Kallady. The academy admits two groups of 600 students per year. These figures were provided by police officers at the National Police Academy.

welfare to the poor (through encouraging police to conduct *Shramadana*[10]).

- Public campaigns to raise awareness about crime issues prevalent in the area (such as domestic violence, child abuse, traffic rules and road safety). These include seminars, information campaigns and mobile police services that visit communities.

Community policing activities are overseen through a series of formal mechanisms. Advisory committees at the station, division and district levels meet monthly and submit reports up the hierarchy of CPUs to ensure that community policing activities are monitored. Yet despite this, discussions with police indicate that the implementation of community policing depends enormously on the decision of the particular OIC at any given station to support it, as well as senior officers' willingness to implement it. The allocation of staffing to the CPUs is the decision of OICs and many do not allocate the requisite staff to the unit.

How 'progress' in community policing is monitored and evaluated is also unclear. What community policing is understood to mean varies considerably across different parts of the country and makes measurement of practices problematic. Divisional and district-level senior police officers typically use the fact that a police officer had been assigned to a GN as a proxy for the implementation of community policing. Yet in reality the mere presence of a police officer within a community says little about whether or not a community policing philosophy has been adopted and whether community policing methods and activities are actually being implemented. This therefore makes it difficult to assess the extent to which CPUs are functioning as intended.

5.3 Bicycle patrolling

A key element of community policing is the conduct of community patrols, including by bicycle, allowing for closer and more frequent interactions with the public.

In Matara all of the CPU officers, as well as selected officers from the Crime and Traffic Unit, undertake bicycle patrols using mountain bike supplied as part of The Foundation's Community Policing Programme.[11] The police officers from the CPU regularly cycle to villages and interact with community members and although the frequency of bicycle patrolling varied from one area to another, the CSC representatives interviewed all claimed to have seen bicycle patrolling taking place in their villages. Patrols appeared to be particularly frequent in urban CSC areas, where members noted that the main roads are patrolled at night and that bicycle patrols record their presence by signing record books, which are kept at key locations on their route. In addition, a large number of GN-assigned police officers also use bicycles to undertake patrols in their assigned communities.

The Foundation also supplied mountain bikes to Vavuniya as part of the Community Policing Programme in 2011. Although the mountain bikes were originally allocated to the CPU unit, they no longer carry out these patrols as this task has been reallocated to a newly created dedicated bicycle patrol unit. Teams of two or three bicycle patrol officers undertake 12-hour shifts, day and night, in busy public and commercial places such as market squares, bus depots and train stations in an effort to combat petty street crime. Whilst these officers do not perceive of themselves to be 'doing community policing', they nonetheless collaborate with the CPU and other police units, as well as the CSC members, and their patrols assist in improving the local population's access to police officers.

5.4 Civil Security Committees (CSCs)

CSCs are a mechanism through which community safety and security issues can be raised and resolved at the local level via monthly joint police–community meetings. While CSCs offer no legally binding formal settlement, they can provide an informal means of airing local grievances and seeking some redress. The CSC representatives we interviewed were both established as CDCs during the war and have since received capacity support from The Foundation.[12] However, the extent to which they are active varies widely. Vavuniya CSC representatives admitted that regular meetings were a challenge as other commitments, including ad hoc responsibilities assigned to police officers, often prevented members from attending.

The purpose of the CSC meetings is to identify local safety and security issues and find solutions from within the community. However, in Vavuniya, other objectives such as support to national security and informing police of situations such as the illegal possession of weapons

10 *Shramadana* is a form of collaborative community service which can include a number of activities, such as clearing trees or shrubs bordering access roads to villages in order to minimise the risk of mosquito-borne dengue.

11 This programme was started in 2012 following a request by the SDIG at the time, after a push by the IGP to increase patrols as a means of addressing the rising problem of drugs in the community.

12 The Asia Foundation support to Matara CSCs began in 2012 and to Vavuniya CSC in 2011. In Matara, this support was channelled through a locally embedded NGO, INDECOS. The constitution of each of the CSCs in both provinces corresponded broadly to the guidelines laid out in the SLPS Community Policing Training Manual (SLPS 2012a) and in all cases included the involvement of the police officer assigned to the CSC GN area.

and group insecurity were also identified. The issues raised during CSC meetings identified both 'security' problems of a criminal nature (i.e. illegal drugs and alcohol, domestic violence and gang activity), as well as broader social concerns that could pose potential security threats were also often highlighted (lack of street lighting, eradication of invasive plants, non-maintenance of roads and roaming elephants that destroy crops) as well as issues that the community felt threatened the moral fabric of society.

While the police play the role of convenors within the CSC, it is clear that their role is seen as peripheral by the CSC representatives (particularly in the North) and there was a general consensus that police intervention is only sought after concerted effort by the CSC representatives to resolve the concern. In this respect the CSC represents a form of community-led policing. In the North this may be explained by language barriers that make police–community interaction more difficult.

6. What are the effects of community policing

Assessing the impact that bicycle patrolling and community policing more broadly has had in Sri Lanka is a challenging task. The shift to citizen-oriented policing has only taken place since 2009 and although the SLPS has adopted community policing as a strategy, there is lack of clarity over what this means in practice. There are no officially agreed common indicators or mechanisms in place to assess the extent to which community policing has been implemented in communities and to evaluate what its impacts have been. Here, however, we set out some of the effects to date.

6.1 Has community policing reduced crime?

All police interviewed claimed that crime has reduced since the introduction of community policing. Yet despite this, it is difficult to discern whether crime rates have actually fallen. In Vavuniya, police officers at all ranks reported that crime rates in the division had dropped 35% between 2012 and 2013 and that 75% of crimes had been solved in 2013. However, it is difficult to verify these claims as official data sources were not readily available. The only formal crime statistics we were able to obtain were at the district level and these were not disaggregated to verify changes in crime rates in particular police stations within a district. The district level data in Vavuniya does not support the proposition that crime rates are reducing – although it may well be the case that it is reducing in some of the stations within the district and increasing in others. Moreover, even if reliable disaggregated data were available, it would be difficult to attribute changes in crime rates to the introduction of community policing alone, and not consider the impact of other factors.

Aside from issues of data availability, where official data does exist, what it demonstrates is open to interpretation. In some cases there was an increase in crime rates but these might demonstrate that crime *reporting* has increased due to greater trust between citizens and police. In a similar vein, reductions in crime rates may also be explained by an increase in the use of local problem-solving mechanisms, such as CSCs, which mean crimes are not reported to the police. In addition, petty crimes which are resolved rapidly or deterred by community policing approaches, such as bicycle patrolling, might not be logged into the complaints book, on which crime statistics are largely based.

It is thus not altogether clear what effect community policing is having on crime reduction efforts. Official data from the two districts we visited point in opposite directions (apparently reducing in Vavuniya but increasing in Matara), and what this data demonstrates is itself open to interpretation.

6.2 Has community policing improved perceptions of safety?

Regardless of whether or not crime rates have in fact decreased, almost all respondents (CSC representatives, NGOs and academics) *perceived* crime to have been reduced. Increased perceptions of safety and security were particularly noted in urban areas where bicycle patrolling has been introduced. The feeling was that bicycle patrolling was deterring illegal and anti-social activities both through the increased physical presence of police, as well as improved information gathering facilitated by better police–community relations.

6.3 Has community policing increased trust between police and communities?

All respondents interviewed claimed that since the introduction of community policing there are increased levels of trust and better relations between police and local communities. Police officers at the station level claim that the public are now more willing to report crimes, and that the police feel the community have greater confidence in them. From their perspective the police credit the perceived reduction in crime to the increased reporting of crimes to the police by victims as a result of improved police–community relations. Community representatives supported this assessment reporting that that they feel more

comfortable visiting a police station, are received in a more cordial manner, and feel reassured that they can talk to police and thus are more willing to report criminal activities, both directly and indirectly. They also claim that the local community perceive police to be more responsive to public complaints and that there has been an improvement in police services. This is supported by the SLPS/Asia Foundation perception surveys, which found that between 2011 and 2013, 84% of respondents first reported crimes to the police rather than others, such as the *grama niladhari* or local community leaders. The surveys also found that community interactions with the police have increased steadily from 11% in 2011 to 25% in 2012 and 29% in 2013. Community interactions with police at CSCs have also reportedly improved, from 8% in 2011, to 15% in 2012 and 23% in 2013.

A number of community policing activities were noted as being particularly important in contributing to improved interaction between police and communities: police patrols at the village level and anonymous complaint boxes provided at CSC meetings. Bicycle policing has specifically helped the SLPS to improve police–community relations in two key ways. First, the use the 'common man's' mode of transport has reduced the social distance between the police and the members of the communities they serve. Secondly, bicycles have enabled police officers to provide a more efficient service to the population in an interactive manner, thus improving citizens' confidence in the police. It has improved the visibility of the police and made them more accessible to communities, enabling more timely response.

6.4 Has community policing enabled greater local problem-solving?

It would appear that community policing mechanisms such as the CSCs have encouraged community members to become more vigilant in relation to their own safety and security. Through CSCs, community members seem to be playing a greater role in problem-solving in their own communities with claims that many issues and disputes are resolved by the community before they escalate and require police intervention. The CSCs reportedly deal with minor land disputes, drug abuse and family conflict, including domestic violence. The police argue that this has reduced the number of minor and miscellaneous complaints that they receive. While this risks some serious matters – such as domestic violence – being resolved by reconciling parties rather than holding perpetrators to account, it is seems to suggest that community policing has enabled a greater degree of citizen involvement in local safety and security issues.

6.5 Has community policing transformed wider policing practises?

While it is clear that community policing, and bicycle patrolling specifically, have had some impact at a local level in terms of improving police–community relations, making people feel safer and enabling locally-led problem solving, its effects at the national level and on the culture of Sri Lankan policing are less clear.

There is clearly an interest in expanding community policing and bicycle patrolling. Perception surveys indicate that the police have been open to some constructive feedback and are interested in further disaggregating data in order to understand what explains differences in crime rates in different areas. In addition, bureaucratic controls at the national level have opened up to allow the creation of a central budget for mountain bikes, and since 2012 all police divisions do have budget lines for bikes.[13] What is less clear is whether community policing is fundamentally transforming policing culture and behaviour in the SLPS. While our research points to some of the best parts of Sri Lankan policing, these do not exist in isolation from the heavy-handed tactics that continue to be associated with the police (FCO 2014; Fernando 2009).

7. What challenges does community policing face?

A number of challenges potentially limit the effectiveness of community policing to provide enhanced community security in Sri Lanka.

7.1 Silos of community policing

Community policing initiatives may have contributed to reductions in crime and improvements in police–community relations and safety at the local level, but these have not been implemented force-wide. Two particular challenges are related to this.

First, although there have been champions for community policing within the police hierarchy over several decades, they would benefit from wider support. Initiatives to introduce community policing have typically been motivated by attempts by individual IGPs to address specific policy challenges at a given time, rather than a coherent strategy to institutionalise community policing across the SLPS.

13 Police stations are frequently requesting more bikes and, in 2014 alone, 200 have been delivered and another 500 are on order (figures provided by Colombo Police Headquarters).

Second, while improved trust has permitted the development of relationships between police involved in community policing and the local community, there have been challenges extending this approach to wider policing structures, including other operational units. In part this is due to a lack of knowledge about the community policing concept outside the CPU and its associated officers.

7.2 Challenge of organisational culture

Since the end of the war there have been concerted efforts and progress made towards retraining officers recruited during the conflict. However, a number of institutional challenges remain with regard to police performance that could undermine community policing activities.

The organisational culture of the police does little to create an enabling environment in which community policing can develop. For example, while older recruits have received catch-up training this needs to lead to fundamental differences in the way they work. Of course, change cannot be expected overnight, particularly given Sri Lanka's long history of colonial and wartime policing, which has encouraged and entrenched traditional styles of policing. Because of this, a key challenge for community policing is the achievement of real institutional and behavioural change.

Change within the service is also partly inhibited by the concentration of police officers in junior ranks. More senior staff and better incentives structures are needed to promote the behavioural change necessary to alter the culture of the service. Low salary scales in the face of rising living costs, the lack of a promotions policy offering prospects for advancement,[14] and the lack of investigative skills remain some of the constraints in developing a professional service and improving public perceptions of the SLPS (Olander 2007; Law and Society Trust 2010).

An additional challenge to the effective implementation of community policing is the frequent and unpredictable transfer of police officers, which undermines relationship-building with communities. Transferring PCs every two years breaks the relationships that are developed with communities which are a critical part of community policing. This is exacerbated in contexts where there are cultural and linguistic gaps between police officers and the communities they serve. Senior police officers in key positions are also transferred frequently, threatening the continuity of community policing strategies put in place by senior police at station level. This is particularly significant given the lack of an overall national strategy for implementing community policing.

7.3 Language issues

Language remains a critical challenge for facilitating improved relations between the police service and community members, particularly in the north of the country. There are a very limited number of native Tamil speakers within the SLPS and they tend to be allocated to desk rather than patrolling duties.

This not only deters Tamil speaking populations from attending police stations, but it hinders relationship-building efforts in Tamil communities. Although there has been considerable progress made at the national level in providing Tamil language courses for Sinhalese-speaking officers, requisite proficiency remains limited and there was a widespread acknowledgement amongst interviewees that despite progress, language remains a real issue.

While it might seem that more Tamil police officers should be recruited in the north to overcome the language difficulties, this has proved problematic in practice due to caste dynamics that complicate intra-Tamil relations. Many respondents – within the police, academia and civil society – reported that this dynamic can mean that higher caste Tamils prefer at times to deal with Sinhalese officers than lower caste Tamil officers.

7.4 Sub-national contextual variations

Despite similarities between the effects of community policing expressed by stakeholders in Vavuniya and Matara, key differences exist with respect to local priorities, the way community policing and bicycle policing has developed, the actors involved, and the effects. This is unsurprising. Vavuniya and Matara have two very different socio-economic contexts and the police divisions have unique histories, with key individuals influencing how community policing agendas have been pursued or not. The nature of crime faced in each area is also different. These contextual factors have inevitably impacted the development of community policing.

Moreover, the two districts have different experiences of conflict and different civil society dynamics, which has inevitably influenced their institutional fabric and the shape that the CSCs have taken. So while there is a shared sentiment that community policing has enabled communities to engage in local problem-solving, the institutional explanations for why this has

14 Although procedural promotion mechanisms exist that make officers eligible for promotion following five years of service, a survey by TISL found that in practice, 60.6% of those surveyed said they had never been promoted (TISL 2006: 40-41).

been the case may diverge. For example, community policing and bicycle patrolling achievements in Matara can potentially be explained by the relative strength of civil society there and the capacity of key stakeholders within it to interact productively with policing structures. The involvement of senior members of the police service favourable to community policing at key moments has also been critical. However, in Vavuniya, where organised civil society is not as institutionalised, direct relationships between The Foundation staff and key police personnel, along with the autonomous nature of CSCs, may have been more appropriate for facilitating change. These variations across districts indicate that models of community policing require tailoring to different sub-national contexts, not just the national context. This should be more formally acknowledged in official community policing policy.

8.Conclusion

Ultimately, the selected findings capture ongoing efforts to implement community policing in a challenging context, where multiple objectives are ascribed to community policing and where its effects show some promise but behaviour change remains to be fully institutionalised.

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