

# Supporting Community Policing & Police Reform

**The Asia Foundation**  
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

Among the damaging legacies of Sri Lanka's decades of civil conflict has been the erosion of trust between citizens and police officers in communities across the country. This was particularly true in the Northern and Eastern provinces which bore the brunt of the violent conflict. With the end of the war, there has been renewed interest and growing acceptance of the need for a community-oriented style of policing to ensure post-conflict stability and normalisation. Yet, a decade after the end of armed conflict, officers still struggle to inspire and build public trust in policing and more must be done to strengthen the relationship between communities and the police, particularly in conflict-affected areas.



During most of its 150 years of existence, the Sri Lanka Police (SLP) has supported traditional, civilian-led forms of policing. However, during the war, the police service was often preoccupied with counter-insurgency and national security. As a result, the relationship between communities and the police deteriorated, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces, where police often viewed community members as potential threats to security, as opposed to a constituency they served. Given that police officers lack peacetime training and experience, they do not have the attitudes and skills required to build relationships with the public that would inspire a greater sense of trust and confidence in policing.

With support from the British High Commission, The Asia Foundation has aimed to improve the quality of policing services by working at structural, institutional, and community levels – supporting implementation of community policing at police stations, strengthening reforms and building capacity at the institutional level, and encouraging cultural transformations at the community level by making the police service more people-friendly and responsive to the needs of citizens.

## TAMIL LANGUAGE TRAINING

Language remains a critical challenge for facilitating improved relations between the police service and community members. The SLP has struggled to provide policing services in Tamil as very few Sinhala police officers speak Tamil fluently, and the numbers of Tamil police officers remain small, despite the SLP's efforts to recruit native Tamil speakers. Working with the National Police Academy, the Foundation has supported Tamil language training for over 5,000 Sinhala police officers through a five-month residential training in police in-service institutes across the country. Over 75% of the trained officers have been deployed in the Northern and Eastern provinces, and multi-ethnic districts across the country where they are able to interact with the Tamil-speaking population of those regions and ensure accessibility of policing services.

## COMMUNITY POLICING PRACTICES

Community policing pilots were conducted from 2009 to 2011 in two districts, which demonstrated improvements in public perceptions of security, police performance, and

community-police relations. Since 2012, the Foundation has engaged with police stations across the country – directly and through community-based organization (CBO) partners – to implement community policing practices such as community police committees, bicycle patrols, mobile police services and community awareness programs. Particularly remarkable are the community police committees (CPCs) which create a platform for monthly community-police dialogues to take joint actions to solve safety and security concerns in their neighborhoods. The CPCs bring together community leaders, police, and government officials to tackle community concerns before they escalate and to address persistent issues within a community.

From 2012 to 2014, the program focused on expanding coverage to ensure community policing practices were not just creating islands of effectiveness. Community policing activities were scaled up to a total of 150 police stations across the nine provinces, representing over a third of police stations island-wide at the time. The Foundation then made a strategic shift to focus on establishing a smaller number of model police stations and CPCs to deepen community policing practice, which was seen as a cost effective and sustainable institutionalization process, and enabled endorsement and support from senior management in the police that can be replicated throughout the police service.

## **INSTITUTIONALIZING COMMUNITY POLICING**

Experience in the Sri Lankan context has shown that community policing needs to be an approach that should be integrated into all aspects of policing rather than being confined to the community policing units within stations. This is central to the Foundation's approach in supporting the SLP to institutionalize community policing. The Foundation's continued partnership with the police training centres, including the Sri Lanka Police College, the National Police Academy, and the In-service Training Division, has contributed to basic theoretical training on community policing being provided to all three recruitment levels—police constables, sub-inspectors, and assistant superintendents. This includes the development of five training manuals which are being used in police training institutes: Community Police Basic Training Manual (2011), Manual on Prevention of Torture (2012), Manual on Effective Handling of Miscellaneous Complaints (2013), Community Policing Practical Guide for OICs (2017) and Community Policing Training Manual (2017).

Since 2011, formal community policing training has been a mandatory component of the basic police training curriculum at the Sri Lanka Police College. To support and expedite institutionalization of community policing, beginning in 2017 the Foundation worked with the National Police Academy to provide community policing training for all Officers-in-Charge (OIC) of stations from across the country, complementing existing training for lower ranks and senior officers, with a total of 568 police officers including 504 OICs and Head Quarter Inspectors (HQIs) being trained through the project. The five-day training included guided exposure visits to police stations. A key development was the practical guide on community policing that builds on and expands existing good practice and advises how to apply the concept of community policing across the station, rather than confine it to only the community policing units. In 2018, the training curriculum was updated to include a session on human rights with a focus on the prevention of torture, and a session on gender and diversity, including inter-faith relations, for the first time.

## **EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY PLANNING**

Through its partnership with the Research and Planning Division (RPD) of SLP, and engagement with the office of the Inspector General of Police (IGP), the Foundation has supported the SLP to begin moving towards evidence-based policy planning. A first of its kind, the national community-police perceptions survey was implemented annually between 2011-15, making it possible to capture community perceptions of community-police relationships and access and use of police services throughout the country. These pioneering surveys provided a platform that enabled the IGP and wider SLP management to better understand the status of community-police relations and use evidence in policy making. The survey results have been used by the IGP and Senior Deputy Inspector Generals (SDIGs) to monitor progress in making improvements.

Other research initiatives supported by the Foundation include surveys on miscellaneous complaints; surveys of police officers; a survey of officers of Women and Children's Desks; qualitative study on Sexual Abuse of Women and Children; police training evaluations including Tamil Language training and community policing training for OICs; a series of surveys to support the national police reform process; and an in-depth qualitative study on community policing. The Foundation has also trained RPD staff to build their capacity to conduct research.

## POLICE REFORM EFFORTS

In July 2016, the former Ministry of Law and Order and Southern Development established a Police Reform Committee (PRC) consisting of representatives from the Sri Lanka Police, the National Police Commission, academia and civil society. Three sub-committees were appointed to examine legal, operational and administrative challenges, and make possible recommendations for reform. As part of the design process, the PRC commissioned the Foundation to manage and facilitate the research and consultation process to inform the development of reform recommendations by the PRC.

Through this process, the Foundation facilitated and supported the PRC to develop a Police Reform Action Plan detailing action-based steps towards improving professional standards of the police; improving transparency and accountability; respect for human rights; preventing crime and reducing fear of crime; and increasing public trust and confidence in the police. The plan is centered on a community policing approach and was seen by the SLP as an accepted pathway for reform. The plan was approved in principle by the Cabinet in January 2019, based on a proposal made by the former President, and remains a practical set of proposals around which consensus for reforms have been built. The Foundation actively supported and provided technical assistance for three key areas of the Action Plan – community policing, human rights and gender – working closely with key policing stakeholders, including the SLP, Ministry of Law and Order and Southern Development and the National Police Commission.

## STRENGTHENING MECHANISMS TO ENABLE SENSITIVE RESPONSES TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The police are most often the first point of contact in Sri Lanka for women seeking redress from acts of violence, including sexual abuse. The Children and Women's Bureau (CWB) of the SLP plays a crucial role in addressing incidents of violence against women and children that are reported to the police. The Foundation works with the CWB centrally and supports Women and Children's Desks (WCDs) at the station level to provide and coordinate effective redress to victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

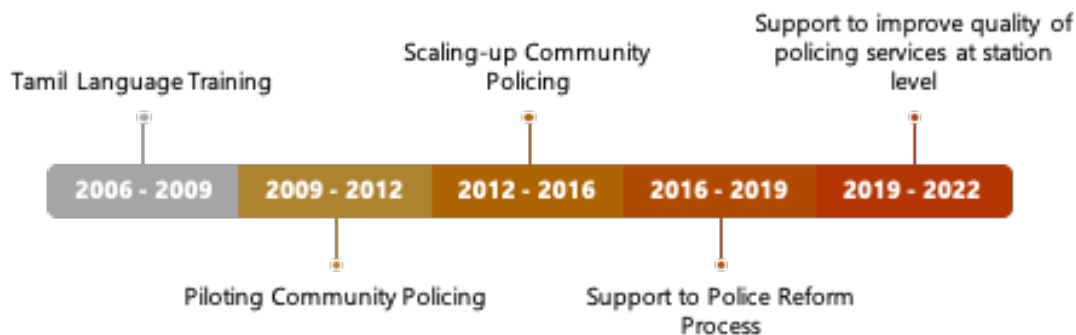
*Database:* The Foundation supported the police to develop the very first computerized database for the

CWB to assist the police to enable better documentation and tracking of reports of SGBV. The database complements existing mechanisms of data collection and reporting and is expected to contribute to improving levels of efficiency within the bureau. As part of this process, the Foundation developed a user manual and trained CWB police officers and headquarter staff, OICs and IT operators from the 42 divisional offices, and 625 IT officers representing all police stations across the country. In October 2017, the National Best Quality ICT Awards recognized the database and the Sri Lanka Police with a Bronze Award for innovation. The Foundation continues to support the SLP to operationalize the database.

*Model Women and Children's Desks:* In partnership with the CWB, the Foundation strengthened formal mechanisms for addressing Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in four program locations – Matara, Batticaloa, Jaffna, and Ratnapura – to develop model women and children's desks that can be replicated across other locations. In these locations, the Foundation provided gender sensitization training for officers attached to desks, which included sessions on interviewing skills and highlighted the importance of engaging men and boys to reduce and prevent violence against women. Prior to the start of this training, a session on community policing concepts was conducted to demonstrate the importance of being gender sensitive and how gender sensitivity must be applied across all units of the service. To provide a more comprehensive set of services to women, the Foundation strengthened linkages between the desks and referral networks with key service providers in program locations. The network brings together representatives from the SLP, hospitals, the Legal Aid Commission, as well as local government representatives, including women's development officers, counselling assistants, midwives, and public health inspectors. The Foundation also supported community awareness programs to publicize available referral services for survivors of violence.

*Experience Sharing and Scaling-up Training:* Building on this work, national workshops conducted for all 42 Divisional OICs of the CWB have helped to develop the capacity of the officers through sharing of knowledge on the updated laws and legal proceedings relating to SGBV and helped the police to understand how better partnerships with other government and CBO service providers can enable a sensitive and effective response to violence against women. The workshops also discussed tracking of SGBV cases through the WCB database





to enable analysis of trends that can then lead to appropriate responses and the 2six4 mobile application—Sri Lanka’s first mobile application to combat SGBV developed by the Foundation. Police officers of the WCDs were also trained on investigating crimes related to SGBV. In addition, the Foundation’s local community-based partners worked with police stations to improve the case management of SGBV-related complaints, including creating station-based SGBV service providers referral networks, as part of efforts to support the Women and Children’s Desks to provide holistic support for victim-survivors.

## STRENGTHENING GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN SLP

Despite ongoing efforts to increase the recruitment of women into the SLP, women remain under-represented with less than 12% of women officers in the force, many of whom are concentrated in lower ranks and in administrative roles. There are also concerns about gender sensitivity within the police, and the way in which women officers are treated, that need to be better understood and sensitively addressed.

With the support of Police Scotland, a series of workshops were conducted at the national and regional levels engaging male and female officers in discussions on the issue of gender equality in order to challenge entrenched cultural attitudes within the service. Workshops were held separately for senior male officers and women officers; women police officers in particular appreciated the unique opportunity to come together in a safe space to discuss their issues and concerns freely. Two assessments were also completed – a gender assessment of the SLP and a study on under-representation of women and other minority groups within the police – to inform this work. One of the significant outcomes of these efforts was the establishment of the Sri Lanka Police Women Development Forum, the first-ever forum for the SLP that is focused specifically on improving the situation of women officers.

The Foundation is currently providing technical support to the SLP to improve the quality of services at the police station level, with a focus on improving community police relations and police response to SGBV, while continuing with efforts to promote gender equality within the police service.

*The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.*

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