

# Chapter 2

## Can Technology Build Trust?

### Community-Oriented Policing and ICT in Afghanistan



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#### Introduction: The Scene

One of the most pressing problems in post-conflict societies is the establishment of trust between the police and citizens. Trust levels are low, and in many cases police services themselves are perpetrators of abuse and violence against communities. Afghanistan is also a case in point. To tackle this problem both Ministry of Interior Afghanistan (MoIA) and the police have taken several measures to facilitate better cooperation between police services and communities. At the heart of these measures is the establishment of community-oriented policing (COP). As a policing model its relevance lies in building trust and legitimacy in police/ community relations. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is an important step in this direction.

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## Scope of the Paper

This paper will explore the motivation, workings and potential effect of the police's use of various information and communication technologies to build trust in Afghanistan. Do these efforts in fact contribute to trust-building and broader human security? What happens to trust-building when it comes to technology mediated interaction? In addition to the police, we look at ICT solutions being developed by civil society that also aim at improving better relations between police and government.

## Research Methodology and Approach

Data collection for this paper involves in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations of meetings and conferences. The data was collected between November 2015 and April 2017 covering Kabul and the province of Nimruz. In both places we conducted interviews with representatives from MoIA, international stakeholders, civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition we also refer to secondary data from research papers, reports and policy documents.

## ICT and Policing

One of the main uses of technology by the police is to enhance their effectiveness in solving crimes. This is also an important objective within post-conflict police reform. Different eras in policing have witnessed technological advancements in combating crimes. For example, in the 30s introduction of two way radio communications, 90s the use of fingerprinting and within criminal investigation storage, retrieval, transfer and application of investigation related information (Fox 2016; Hekim et al. 2013). Recently, the use of mobile applications to report crime is also being explored. Different periods have witnessed different technological contributions and advancements within policing to help solve crimes.

Social media in particular, although new in its form, is gaining momentum and becoming quite prevalent in policing. Bartlett et al. (2013) identify three avenues on the use of social media by the police: intelligence, enforcement and engagement. In our paper the focus is on the use of ICTs for engagement and trust-building between police and communities. The use of social media by the police offers new possibilities of engagement with communities by way of contact, information sharing and instant participation on issues of safety and security. This is not an easy task in post-conflict contexts where citizen's perception and trust-levels of police are low. Our aim is to critically view how police and civil society in a post-conflict society such as Afghanistan can mutually benefit from ICTs in ensuring human security.

## Human Security and Trust

Although the focus of using ICT is often on crime identification, reporting and prevention, enhancing police relations is equally important. Myhill reminds us of the importance of community engagement:

The process of enabling the participation of citizens and communities in policing at their chosen level, ranging from providing information and reassurance, to empowering them to identify and implement solutions to local problems and influence strategic priorities and decisions. The police, citizens, and communities must have the willingness, capacity and opportunity to participate. (Myhill 2006, p. 01)

Research has pointed out how trust building and legitimacy are both crucial for community-police relations to be effective and fruitful (Sherman 1997; Stoutland 2001; Tyler and Huo 2002). Several studies have shown that citizen cooperation is vital for good and effective policing (Cordner 1997; Greene and Pelfry 1997; Skogan 1998). COP is an important policing model that can facilitate better cooperation and trust between the police and community (Alderson 1977, 1979; Bennett 1994; Greene 2000). In addition, citizen's perceptions of the police are greatly enhanced by their contact with the police (Cheurprakobkit 2000; Hawdon and Ryan 2003). The crucial question is how ICT can facilitate the above mentioned outcomes in post-conflict countries where trust and legitimacy are low.

A human security approach captures the various challenges of insecurities experienced by different people. Central to the understanding is the focus on the security of populations rather than the security of the state. The concept facilitates the understanding of police-community relations involving different actors and institutions at all levels. It is in this context one has to view the role of ICTs in reducing human insecurities and strengthening the relations between police and communities. Although there are a number of advantages in the use of ICTs, there are also risks involved in such emerging technologies especially in fragile societies trying to cope with trust, security and reconstruction challenges. Some of the risks are; the use of ICTs by an unaccountable police causing more insecurity, lack of a guarantee of safety for those using such technologies and the lack of protection of data generated through ICTs in terms of who has access to it. Without community engagement and support, the use of ICTs in building a safe environment would be fruitless.

## Afghan Security Sector and ICT

MoIA in 2013 envisioned a ten-year plan to reform the Afghan National Police (ANP) from a 'militarized' unit for combating terrorism and counter-insurgency to a 'service' unit. Community-Oriented Policing (COP) was at the heart of this vision. The use of technology on the part of MoIA is a step in this direction.

The use of traditional media bettering the image between the police and citizens has been in use for some time. For example, an NGO interviewed in Kabul explained how they invited a police representative to their radio show to facilitate direct interaction between the police and communities. Also, a radio channel called 'Radio Police' was launched by MoIA with the intent of bettering communication and contact between the police and public (Zaland 2015). In addition, MoIA<sup>1</sup> has been developing their Media and Outreach Directorate to perform better outreach to citizens and improve transparency.

In 2009, MoIA launched the helpline 119 as their first major ICT initiative. The line was originally designed with the aim of assisting citizens to help them make complaints against police misbehavior, corruption and human rights violations. It later included the reporting of criminal and terrorist activities. In 2013 the line was extended to five other provinces. In order to create public awareness about the existence of the line, a private TV channel had a TV program called 'Show Reaction 119' (Zaland 2015). Still, however, there are no 119 units in most of the provinces.

Despite increasing awareness and use of the helpline, both ethical and technical shortcomings have been pointed out by MoIA officials and NGO representatives. Some of the technical shortcomings identified were lack of sufficient maintenance and support systems. People manning the call centers are not professional police, causing delays in action to be taken. On the ethical side the biggest challenge is, as mentioned by NGO leaders, safeguarding the identity of the caller and controlling who has access to all the incoming data.

In 2013, MoIA launched a Facebook and Twitter page. These are forums where the police can inform of their activities and people can comment on them, and people can also inform the police about security issues or problems occurring in the neighborhood and even post films showing the police catching criminals.

From our field studies in Nimruz Province, examples from the Shuras<sup>2</sup> in the city show how communities in partnership with the police help to curb crimes and insurgencies. An important step in this preventive measure is the provision of cell phone numbers of the police to Shura members who can now call upon them anytime in case of an emergency.

These efforts on the part of the Government may look small and insignificant. However, keeping the context of Afghanistan as a conflict/post-conflict society facing insurmountable challenges on the issues of trust, security, corruption and accountability in mind, such measures can nevertheless contribute to improving relations between police and communities. What is important to note, however, is that these technologies are only useful if they are initiated in a context of mutual trust – they need a trusted relationship to begin with, and then may build trust over

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<sup>1</sup>With the assistance of a private consulting firm through the Strategic Support Ministry of Interior (SSMI) project.

<sup>2</sup>A local committee of respected community members.

time if communication continues. The question to be asked then is how to build enough trust between communities and the police such that ICTs will in fact enhance this trust.

## Civil Society, the Police and ICTs

It should be mentioned that civil society was involved with Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) and other government agencies in various projects following the Bonn agreement in 2001, but these efforts were scattered and there was no institutionalized relationship between the two.

This changed with the implementation of the Democratic Policing or Community Policing Pilot<sup>3</sup> in 2009. To design this project, civil society organizations conducted consultations with diverse stakeholders including parliamentarians, NGOs, civil society organizations, media, academics and different community members representing vulnerable groups like women, children and ethnic minorities. The program was called Police e Mardumi (PEM) (ISSAT-DCAF 2017). Later this program turned into a permanent Community Policing Directorate at the Afghanistan Ministry of Interior. Civil society along with Afghan media in collaboration with MoIA launched awareness campaigns by using mobile phones, social media, TV and radio plays to highlight the importance of citizen initiatives regarding issues of safety and security (ISSAT-DCAF 2017).

While civil society organizations were instrumental in eventual creation of the Community Policing Unit in MOIA, their further involvement with Community Policing came with the implementation of the Afghanistan Democratic Policing Project (ADPP). This three-year project was initiated in 2013 and involved several national and international NGOs, coordinated through UNAMA<sup>4</sup>, UNOPS<sup>5</sup> and UNDP<sup>6</sup>. The activities in this bold and engaging project were diverse and covered many different aspects of community-police relations.<sup>7</sup>

ICT tools become important when it comes to issues like gender barriers. This was highlighted by a leading Afghan female ICT entrepreneur interviewed in Kabul. In 2010 she set up a software company as a non-profit organization in Herat Province of Afghanistan to teach girls and women about computers, programming, financial literacy and business skills. Although such initiatives may not be directly related to

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<sup>3</sup>Use of Democratic Policing instead of Community policing was to avoid confusion between Local Police and Community Policing- Local Police is rather a “Militia” Force envisioned to defend population centers at the local level.

<sup>4</sup>United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations Office for Project Services.

<sup>6</sup>United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>7</sup>From series of document received from United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Afghanistan office.

policing, such efforts open avenues of cooperation and trust-building between civil society and government organizations. In a conservative society like Afghanistan where women may not be allowed to move outside their houses, access to ICT tools like radio, mobile phones and internet could be considered a positive sign.

## **Police Engagement with Civil Society ICT Efforts**

Afghan civil society has been successfully able to mobilize public engagement and support on a variety of issues. For example, Integrity Watch Afghanistan launched a website in 2015 where common people could visit and register their complaints regarding government conduct. The website acted as a whistle-blower. Complaints could be registered through email, SMS, Call, Website and Facebook page.

Collaboration between the police and civil society is challenging, and direct links between the police and civil society may be too risky when trust remains an issue. In such cases, combining information collected by civil society along with face-to-face interactions between civil society and the police can be an appropriate model to build awareness, trust and legitimacy. More challenging is the relationship at the national level, where security actors have a strong position in determining government policy. Recently, through the efforts from the international community, there have nevertheless been some major achievements in developing good and stable relationships between civil society and ANSF (army, police, and intelligence). In 2016 for example, MoIA and Afghanistan Human Rights Commission (AHRC) signed a MoU that facilitates AHRC to conduct observation into the conduct of the Security and Defence Organizations.

## **Conclusions**

Addressing issues of security and insecurity within post-conflict contexts is not easy. A well-functioning police service as providers of security, safety and justice to all citizens is an important institution for successful state building. An important step towards community engagement between authorities and police has been the use of ICTs. Central to these efforts has been the various initiatives taken by MoIA. We also pointed out different challenges involved in using ICTs in post-conflict contexts. However, for technologies to be effective there needs to be a certain level of trust between the police and the communities. The role of civil society in this process is central since they have knowledge and experience of people's insecurities and distrust. The collaboration between civil society and police in using ICTs is challenging, but our research shows that it can be feasible and contribute to community engagement, better communication and mutual trust building.

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