Chapter 24
Community Policing in India: Transparency through E-Governance

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ABSTRACT

‘Community policing’, a major reform in policing, broadens the police mandate beyond the traditional focus of fighting crime to addressing community problems through a personalized approach that draws citizens into the process of policing themselves. Emulating this movement, the Police Administration in numerous states of India have recently engaged in community policing through e-governance specifically tailored to meet the diverse needs of their populace. Two such case studies, eCOPS in Andhra Pradesh and Lokvani in Uttar Pradesh are discussed showing the multifold benefits of such a movement in increasing transparency, trustworthiness, and efficiency of the police administration. The chapter concludes by making a bid to foster this symbiotic digital mode of interaction between the police and citizens by introducing domain specific performance measures. Such measures will allow for easy monitoring, revising, and garnering national support to institutionalize, validate, standardize, facilitate, and promote these programs to help create a proactive all-hazards resilient citizenry for the future.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with a culture marked by a high degree of syncretism and cultural pluralism. The nation is a federal republic consisting of 28 states and seven Union Territories. The Indian peninsula has an area of 3.28 million sq kms (about 1/3 the land mass of the US), and its coastline stretches about 5,700 kms on the mainland and about 7,500 kms including the two island territories of Andaman and Nicobar. India is the world’s second most populous country with an estimated population of 1.13 billion (about 1/6 of the world’s population). It has a population density of approximately 340 people per square kilometer compared to the U.S. with 30 people per square kilometer (Census of India, 2001). Each state or union territory is divided into basic units of government
and administration known as districts. There are nearly 600 districts in India and those are in turn divided into tehsils and eventually into villages. Approximately 70% of Indians reside in rural areas. However, in recent decades migration to larger cities has led to a dramatic escalation in the country’s urban population thereby increasing cultural diversity. Although the constitution recognizes Hindi and English as the official language, 22 other languages are spoken abundantly, some having classical status with a number of dialects summing as high as 1,652. In addition to this linguistic heterogeneity, India is also characterized by its ethnic and religious diversity. The Indian Census (2001) has established that Hinduism accounts for 80%, Islam, accounts for 13%, about 2% of the population adheres to Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism, and the rest are accounted for by other native Indian religions namely Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. In 1976 constitutional law declared India as a secular nation, but even prior to this legislative proclamation the subcontinent has been distinguished by its religious secularism and cultural diversity. India is a relatively poor country, earning an estimated 2004 GDP per capita of $3,100 in the Purchasing Power Parity (CIA, 2005). Human Development Index figures indicate that it ranked 127 out of 177 countries (UNDP, 2005).

Since gaining independence from the British Raj in 1947, India has rapidly progressed through developments in information technology, the service sectors, nuclear capabilities and food exports. However, despite these impressive gains in economic investments and output, there seems to be a growing disparity between the urban rich and the rural poor due to the continued imbalances in economic and educational attainment levels of the people. Additionally, India faces pressing problems due to significant overpopulation, environmental degradation, widespread corruption, natural disasters, and, more recently, the increased threat of terrorism from political, ethnic and religious factions from within and outside the country. The unsuspecting casualties of these events are softer community targets, like women, children, the elderly, and religious and ethnic minorities. Lack of education and insufficient monetary resources make it difficult for the military and the police intelligence to mitigate against these threats, and to have a unified crime prevention strategy. Thus in recent years the Indian government has taken various legislative measures to reinforce the disaster prevention and management agencies including the police machinery and infrastructure at the national and state levels.

With technological advancements and the increasing sophistication in criminal activities, traditional anti-crime police activities are becoming increasingly difficult and less effective in India. Researchers have noted that this ‘criminal cosmopolitanism’ (Amarnathan 2003; Krishnamurthy 2003) has caused the Indian police to revisit their conventional policing styles. Police Administrators in numerous states of India have recently engaged in ‘community policing’ through e-Governance to make their functioning more transparent, quicker, and cost effective, and to empower citizens by allowing them to help the police perform non-crime functions. This chapter considers two case studies, namely eCOPS in the state of Andhra Pradesh and Lokvani in the state of Uttar Pradesh, highlighting the interactions between the police and the citizens and follows with a discussion of the challenges of sustaining them in the future. Finally, the authors conclude by making a bid for expanding community policing through e-Governance by institutionalizing it at the national level and facilitating and funding it at the state and local police levels so as to create a cadre of proactive, emergency ready, empowered community leaders, and citizens that are more disaster resilient in the future.
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