

Public-Private Partnerships for Police Reform

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Introduction

In contemporary democracies, police reform is a continuous process. Even the most professional and sophisticated police agencies constantly strive to improve their effectiveness in preventing crime, detecting and apprehending criminals, and increasing the integrity of their organizations and their legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

For police reform to succeed, however, it needs external as well as internal support. Without leadership committed to improvement within a police organization, external calls for reform will rarely penetrate to the daily delivery of police services on the front lines. But without external support for reform, even the most committed police leadership will lose the political backing and resources necessary to sustain a successful reform process.

Perhaps the most promising but least studied source of external support for police reform is the private business community. Not only do private sector companies command political attention, they hold talent, dynamism, creativity, and a wealth of resources that can be useful to reformers within police agencies. At the same time, partnerships with private businesses, if poorly structured, can erode the professionalism and legitimacy of police organizations. The most successful police leaders who welcome or promote partnerships with the business community are careful not to adopt the profit motive of business as their own, nor to assume that all business people necessarily understand customer service or quality control.

Even as practitioners and scholars are starting to test both the benefits and the dangers of public-private partnerships for police reform, such partnerships are multiplying around the world. In 2003, the Vera Institute of Justice and the Ford Foundation gathered a group of police and private sector representatives from Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States in Nanyuki, Kenya. The meeting in Kenya provided one of the first opportunities to explore the motives that may lead both police and business leaders to expand the range of their collaborations, as well as the early results. Until now, the growth of business partnerships with the police has proceeded in local isolation. While some business leaders may occasionally be exposed to collaborations in cities or states that they visit, and while some police officials may hear stories of how their colleagues in other jurisdictions build relationships with local businesses, there has been little systematic study or sharing of the experiences.

What does recent experience suggest can reasonably be achieved through these partnerships in the short and long term? How can the dangers of police collusion with business leaders be avoided while encouraging constructive and principled public-private partnerships? How can the skills and resources of businesses genuinely extend the benefits of professional public policing to all citizens in democratic societies? Can public-private

partnerships increase the access of vulnerable groups and the poor to safety and justice? These were some of the questions raised at the meeting in Kenya.

The Choice Facing Business Leaders

The involvement of business leaders in police reform is almost as old as the police itself. In the New York City of 1870s, for example, business leaders confronted problems of police corruption that are still familiar in some police forces today: government was in the hands of corrupt politicians who used the police for their own profit. Through what historian Arthur Schlesinger describes as their “absolute control of the police,” New York’s political leaders maintained a system of graft, bringing them an estimated seven million dollars each year. Police officers had to purchase their posts and promotions, some costing ten thousand dollars each. In response, Peter Cooper—a fabulously wealthy industrialist who at one time controlled more than half the telegraph wires in the United States—helped to found the Society for the Prevention of Crime. Over its first two decades, the society’s leadership focused on the investigation of police corruption and the support of reform-minded political and police leadership, eventually provoking the overthrow of the corrupt regime, the appointment of a future American President, Theodore Roosevelt, as president of the police board, and the first steps toward professional policing in New York.¹

Nevertheless, while Peter Cooper and his business colleagues aided the process of reform in nineteenth century New York, other businessmen benefited from the corruption and impeded progress. As in many countries today, business leaders in New York had to choose sides: either supporting the long term development of professional and effective law enforcement for the society as a whole, or seeking private advantage for their own firms and senior executives by acquiescing in the corrupt and unequal administration of justice. The experience of the Society for the Prevention of Crime shows how business leaders can serve as a force for good government, for accountability, for honest policing, for transparency. Independent, powerful, resource rich—the private sector has the potential to demand effective, appropriate, and legitimate policing; but it also has the potential to thwart these same ambitions.

A Focus on Service to Citizen-Customers

Business leaders often ask what—other than extra funds—they can contribute to effective police reform. One answer is skills. Today, successful businesses possess a particular set of skills that police departments need: *the skills of professional customer service*. The citizens in democratic societies can be viewed as the customers of police services. Such a view of citizens would encourage the development of an accessible, responsive service, one in which police officers see their primary duty as protecting the citizens, not merely their political rulers.

¹ P. Rishell and A. Roraback, *A History of the Society for the Prevention of Crime (1877-1979)*, (New York: Society for the Prevention of Crime, as revised by H.R. Wishengrad, 1979) chapters one and two. See also, articles on “Peter Cooper” and “Society for the Prevention of Crime” in Kenneth Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press, 1995).

As a South African participant in the Kenya meeting noted, public-private partnerships are about voluntary engagement for mutual benefit, combining resources and competencies. Business leaders understand the value of customer relations; they know what good service is and how to provide it. The largest companies have invested vast sums in recruitment, training, and supervision of their employees so that they deliver the best possible level of service. This skill and capacity can be shared with police.

Moreover, simply by engaging with police leaders in the process of retraining the front-line staff, business leaders can help build a culture of service in police organizations. As policing expert David Bayley notes, “Increasing contacts between police personnel and respectable, non-criminal members of the public is an important way of encouraging the development of an accountable, service-oriented police organization.”²

The police depend on citizens to assist in almost every aspect of crime prevention and investigation. Mobilizing that public support is essential to the core mission, and good treatment of the public is one way to build public support. Good treatment and professional service are hard enough to deliver in calm encounters between police and citizens, but particularly challenging in the emotionally charged circumstances in which citizens and the police typically turn to each other for help. As one recent study observes, “Apart from officials in specialized crime detection agencies, most operational police officials engaged in routine, day to day, policing probably spend most of their time...assisting people who are experiencing some kind of personal emergency.”³ Like the most successful businesses, police organizations should be recruiting, training, and supervising to achieve the highest level of service to citizens.

The strategy of police reform through a *service orientation* stands in contrast to the strategy of reform through *political independence*. As reform-minded police leaders seek to strengthen the professional integrity of their organizations and distance themselves from the narrow, private, and often illegitimate interests of the political elite of the moment, they are often tempted to describe their goal as the establishment of “independence” for the police. In practice, however, not only is such independence difficult to achieve and sustain, it also threatens to subvert any system of public accountability essential to policing in a democracy. For this reason, the Patten Commission for police reform in Northern Ireland carefully substituted in its report the phrase “operational responsibility” for “operational independence” (the customary British phrase), suggesting that police professionalism must prevail in making operational decisions but not at the expense of having to account for what has been done.

For a police organization, a partnership with the private sector to strengthen service to the citizenry can provide useful distance from the partisan interests of a particular government administration; but, in contrast to a campaign for independent authority, it does so by emphasizing accountability to multiple constituencies rather than independence from them all. A partnership with business leaders to advance customer service should bolster the

² Bayley, D.H. “Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to do and how to do it” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001) p25.

³ Crawshaw, R., Devlin, B. and Williamson, T. “*Human Rights and Policing Standards for Good Behaviour and a Strategy for Change*” (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1998) p18.

ability of a police force to withstand pressure from specific politicians seeking to advance their own parochial interests and mitigate against the image of the police as “politicized.” As a participant from India noted, the involvement of business in police reform offers hope that “innovation and courage” will prevail.

Particularly in societies shifting from authoritarian to democratic regimes, the practice of service to citizen-customers can become a new source of legitimacy. When authoritarian regimes lose their legitimacy, institutions closely aligned to those regimes, such as the police, can find their own legitimacy questioned by association. For the police in transitional societies, this means they must find a new source of legitimacy. Too great an association with particular business tycoons, particularly those who may have profited at public expense during a transition, may further erode any claims to legitimacy. If police merely shift their allegiance from politicians to tycoons, they can accelerate their loss of stature. On the other hand, if police associate themselves with the customer orientation of the market and its democratic potential, their new commitment to serve the citizenry using the language and methods of successful businesses can help restore their credibility.

These reforms need time to establish themselves in the culture of a police institution. Early in the process, they can easily be uprooted if they lose the support of the government of the day. In those early days, business leaders can help keep these kinds of reforms on track, forming a sort of pressure group to demand professional service from the police, regardless of who is in government.

What’s In It for Business

Public security is a public good, and the potential benefits of police reform flow principally to the public. Increased transparency and accountability, more professional service, a stronger focus on preventing and responding to ordinary crime—all of these would accrue to the community at large. Leaders in the private sector can move this agenda forward by raising public expectations, demanding more respectful and responsive service, sharing expertise and capacity in recruitment and training, and assisting police supervisors to build a culture of teamwork, performance measurement, and high productivity in their organizations. In short, business leaders can revolutionize the way that police services are delivered to citizens.

But why should they do this? Is this a sensible investment of the time and resources of a business community, or would business leaders be better advised to invest in their own private security arrangements and let the public system succeed or fail on its own?

In practice, business leaders are investing in public-private partnerships for police reform all over the world. In India, enlightened individuals in well established corporations like the Tata Group, with its longstanding tradition of public service, are choosing to work with the police for the greater good of their fellow citizens. The Mumbai-based business association, Indian Merchants’ Chamber, is committed to making Mumbai a world class city and is working on police reform as part of that process. Business Trust, an initiative of companies in South Africa, wants to build productive relationships with government and sees crime reduction and professional policing as issues on which it can help. A former

chief constable from the United Kingdom suggested another motivation for business leaders. Referring to their “habits of mind,” he said that having been successful in private business, they are motivated to employ their skills in the public sector.

Different Structures and Scope

South Africa

Nelson Mandela, in 1996, asked the private sector to join with the government in combating crime and the causes of crime. The result was the creation in South Africa of Business Against Crime (BAC), a professionally staffed organization controlled by business leaders that has worked with police nationally and in many local areas to improve the speed and effectiveness of police response to crimes such as car hijacking, improve the management of police stations and service delivery to crime victims, use computer technology more effectively to move cases to trial, and improve crime prevention programs in schools. Leaders of BAC explain their motives in terms of improving the safety of their large and diverse workforces, improving the climate for business investment, and strengthening the relationship between government and business.

BAC has evolved from being viewed as, and indeed viewing itself as, a source of funds to a source of skills. To facilitate the transfer of skills, government servants are assigned to businesses for extended periods of time. BAC limits its involvement to government, believing that engagement with local communities is the responsibility of government not the private sector.

Kenya

In Kenya, rather than form a group explicitly dedicated to crime reduction and police reform, a group of business leaders already organized in the Nairobi Central Business District Association (NCBDA) decided to work with the police on the development of “community policing.” The business leaders explain their decision as a means of diffusing the tension between the police and the community, while acknowledging that crime and distrust of the police generally were eroding their ability to attract customers to their downtown businesses.

Unlike the South African BAC, the Kenyan NCBDA interacts closely with both government and the public. In the district of Ruai, far from its downtown base, NCBDA helped build kennels for police dogs because that was what the community wanted. NCBDA has also set up police information centers and community policing centers in many parts of Nairobi. Cognizant of the need to boost police morale, it also gives awards to the police and has projects aimed at improving their living conditions.

Brazil

In Sao Paulo, Brazil, several of the city’s business leaders founded and still maintain the Institute Sao Paulo Against Violence, mobilizing business associations, private companies, academic institutions, community associations, and media organizations in the effort to reduce crime. The institute develops policies and programs for reducing violence and

increasing the security of citizens in the State of Sao Paulo. Since its formation in 1997, the institute has supported projects aimed at promoting police reform and increasing police responsiveness and accountability to the public.

As a matter of policy, the institute does not provide any material support to the police. Unlike the NCBDA in Kenya, it does not hand out awards to the police. Careful to minimize the potential for corruption, the institute's leadership emphasizes a broad alliance between business, police, and the media. Its main mission is to work with the police to prevent crime. The institute's "Crime Stoppers" project, for example, runs a call center for tips from the public about criminal activity; the information is then passed on to the police. In two years, this project has reportedly helped police solve about 2,500 crimes.

India

In several cities in India local business leaders have long supported specific projects to improve traffic safety or reduce crime in the vicinity of their companies, but recently some business executives have proposed extending the ambition of these partnerships to improve customer service and police responsiveness more generally. Some are even working to improve the working and living conditions of the lower ranks of police in a bid to raise morale. Here the motives include frustration with the slow pace of state-sponsored reform efforts. The business leaders are clear that the goal is developing a police institution that serves all sectors of society. They believe that creating this public good is in their interest.

Perhaps the most useful role played by business in India is that of advocacy. It is using its political clout to demand better service from police and, in the process of doing this, is also raising the consciousness of the general public that safety and security is a fundamental *right*.

Since the meeting in Kenya, the two participants from India (the deputy secretary of the India Merchants' Chamber and the former head of the Central Bureau of Investigation) have formally launched a project known as the Business Initiative for Professional Policing (BIPP) with funding from the Ford Foundation. A team of successful businessmen and retired senior police officials are partnering with police management in Mumbai and New Delhi to create "islands of excellence" in policing. Possible BIPP activities include the creation of a model police station in Mumbai and zero tolerance traffic enforcement in Delhi.

United States

Twenty community leaders from industry, academia, and the clergy serve on the board of the New Orleans Police Foundation, a public-private partnership dedicated to strengthening the police department and promoting public safety in New Orleans. Leaving police oversight to other agencies, the foundation focuses on crime reduction. Since its creation in 1995, the foundation has changed the police department's definition of "success" from number of arrests made to reduction in crime rates. It has sustained the interest of the business community by showing the correlation between the drop in crime rate and rise in hotel room occupancy. It provides material support to police officers by

way of health insurance and tuition reimbursement. The Police Foundation maintains open communications with the mayor's office, city council, federal agencies, and the police department.

United Kingdom

Even in some of the best resourced and most respected police organizations, business leaders are guiding the process of continuing reform. In the United Kingdom, for example, London First, a membership organization of some of the biggest London businesses, is sponsoring "joint mentorships" that pair business leaders and borough commanders to exchange views and expertise. London First is applying business practices in recruiting and training to improve those functions in the police service and plans to use the business community's expertise in marketing and communications to improve the profile of the police in London. Organizers assert that London is already one of the safest cities in the world, but they insist that business leaders have a role in making it even safer and better policed.⁴

Nigeria

A police force was first created in Nigeria when a trading company sought the king's permission to set it up in order to protect its investments. A century later, business still has a vested interest in the police, often for the same reason. As a result, business support for the police can easily be perceived as an effort to secure preferential treatment. For example, businesses have built police posts, installed them on or near their own premises, and donated them to the police. This has the effect of making police services contingent on who can pay for them.

The chairman of the Police Service Commission noted at the Kenya meeting that the position of chief commissioner of police in the oil-rich River state is much sought after, in large part because of business interest in policing. The chairman asked the chief to provide him with a list of contributions he had received from the private sector, and the length of the resulting list surprised even the chairman. Among many other things, it included the donation of walkie talkie handsets, generators, vehicles, and refurbishing of police station premises.

Another Nigerian speaker at the Kenya meeting stressed that efforts to engage private business leaders in public-spirited police reform would have to proceed with great caution, but he endorsed the need to move in this direction. The challenge, he explained, is to move the private sector from thinking parochially about its immediate security interests to a broader consideration of long term police reform. There certainly are segments of the business community to whom this approach would appeal, he said.

Focus Issues

⁴ Partnership in Policing (February 2001). Available from http://www.c-london.co.uk/data/partnership_in_policy.pdf. Cited on December 20, 2002.

It was clear from the meeting that participants from different parts of the world, with widely divergent experiences of public-private partnerships, had similar concerns. The following issues were discussed at length.

➤ *Private Security*

For businesses, the investment of time and money in public policing does not preclude the simultaneous investment in private security. Indeed, in all of these countries private security is flourishing; but neither business nor police leaders are sanguine about this growth. For business the increasing reliance on private security firms offers more direct control, but also additional, hefty costs. For the police, the presence of private security services in some areas frees their officers to concentrate their efforts in other places and in more specialized activities.⁵ But it also means that public police must compete for personnel and the confidence of politically powerful constituencies, while managing occasional conflicts between public and private forces. Ironically, then, the desire to limit the growth of private policing may itself be driving police and business leaders into closer collaboration.

➤ *Media*

Several participants in the Kenya meeting noted the role of the media in police reform. Most media organizations are themselves a part of the private sector, but their central role in shaping public debate and discourse means that both the citizenry and the police can use the media to their advantage. NGOs can use the media to educate the public about their rights to effective and professional service from the police; individual citizens can call in anonymously to radio stations to describe specific incidents of police brutality or corruption; and the police themselves can use the media to publicize their accomplishments.

➤ *Morale*

The meeting also focused on the need to consider ways of using partnerships with the private sector to improve police morale. In many countries policemen are themselves part of the poor communities they are expected to serve. They too need a livable wage, health insurance, and education for their children. In New Orleans the Police Foundation offers tangible support to policemen in the form of health insurance and tuition reimbursement. In India, young, dynamic police managers have attempted to improve the work environments and boost the morale of their staffs. Recognizing that they cannot increase the meager salaries of their policemen, they have provided a lounge or rest area at the police station for constables, provided newspapers, magazines, and board games, and found volunteers to give free yoga and meditation classes.

➤ *Composition of Public-Private Partnerships*

⁵ Vera Institute of Justice “*The Public Accountability of Private Police: Lessons from New York, Johannesburg, and Mexico City*” (New York, August 2002) p1.

A core rationale for creating public-private partnerships is that they are likely to increase the general demand for quality police service. Participants in the Kenya meeting cautioned, however, that the balance between government, business, and civil society in these partnerships is crucial, and that the best balance will be different from one country to the next. In South Africa, for example, the exclusive partnership between business and government is successful because the government itself has demanded change in policing. In Nigeria, India, and Indonesia, by contrast, an effective partnership may need to include civil society, so that the interests and priorities of the poor and disenfranchised will be represented. As one Indonesian participant noted, the issue of trafficking in women and children is serious for the police and public but does not resonate with Indonesian business leaders, suggesting the need to include human rights groups in these partnerships.

Conclusion

At their best, private sector partnerships with police contribute to the goals of democratic policing by adding new channels of police accountability. These partnerships have their own dangers, but the formal partnerships do not create these dangers; they merely render them more visible. Indeed, the dangers are clear precisely because these partnerships invite us to see the problems of policing a democracy from a perspective that recognizes, and elevates, the challenging social context within which police operate.