Policy Brief

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN ISLAMABAD POLICE

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INTRODCUTION

Effective policing is a critical state function for maintaining law and order and providing services to citizens. Pakistan inherited a legacy policing system from the British that was primarily a colonizing tool with little emphasis on service delivery. After independence, police stations became symbols of corruption and malpractice, and the much-vilified Thana culture kept normal citizens away from police stations. There have been many attempts at police reforms to create a professional, service-oriented, and accountable force to prevent and detect crime as well as maintain public order. In the past few years, Pakistan has introduced technologies and software to its police force to enhance accountability and meritocracy. These technologies were first implemented in the Punjab Police and are now being replicated in the Islamabad Police (IP).

As part of its digitization drive, IP is operating online database management systems that have been developed by Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB). These systems are used by all the stakeholders in the hierarchy. These Management Information Systems (MIS) are functional in all 24 police stations in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). The components of MIS are the Criminal Record Management System (CRMS), Police Station Record Management System (PRMS), and Complaint Management System (CMS).

Technology adoption is not merely the introduction of softwares and technical gadgetries but encompasses a cultural change in its outlook and acceptance by its users. The same was emphasized in PC-1 of the project, which included research by subject matter specialists in human behavior to holistically address the expectations of the citizens. Consequently, this study was carried out to ascertain human behaviors within the police organizations and among citizens regarding technology adoption by the police.

***Objective*:** To identify the issues and challenges in technology adoption faced by the Islamabad Police; furthermore, to analyze the public's opinions about MIS.

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this study is to examine the perspectives of stakeholders on the MIS used by IP. The stakeholders include police officials and the general public. The perspectives of the IP are incorporated through the lens of their experiences with the MIS. The general public's perspectives are incorporated through the lens of their experiences with the filing of First Information Reports (FIR) and case follow-up. Initial field surveys were conducted to: derive an idea about the working of these systems; and identify the focal persons who deal with the MIS. MIS is used by all the officials in the hierarchy of IP; its primary users are the Front Desk Operators (FDOs). Two to three FDOs are appointed at each police station; in some instances, the number of FDOs is higher. Interviews with 21 FDOs, 10 officers, and 11 members of the public were conducted. Members of the public were complainants who had filed a complaint with the IP in the last 18 months. Reflexive thematic analysis

was used to derive key findings from the interviews.

FINDINGS

The issues pointed out by the participants fall into four major themes: infrastructure landscape, human resources, software support, and conventional vis-à-vis MIS based systems.

Infrastructure Landscape

In the infrastructure landscape, FDOs complained about extended duty hours and employment outside their mandated tasks. The non-availability of separate working spaces for FDOs was found to be another impediment. Despite the availability of a fiber-optic-based intranet, the police use the internet for connectivity, which faces frequent issues due to overdue bills and system outages. There were technical barriers as FDOs lacked the requisite technological base. Legacy computers also caused slow data entry, and there were power backup issues in a few police stations. The lack of a local forensic lab in Islamabad causes substantial delays in the prosecution of cases.

Human Resources

In human resources, some of the FDOs highlighted the issue of deficient and untrained staff. FDO also complained about being placed under station clerks and placed on routine policing duties, which creates a backlog and long work hours. Frequent postings and a lack of cooperation from seniors were the other main concerns.

Software Support

Police officials emphasized difficulties connected to cyber security, backup repositories, ICT support, and the compatibility of digital records with the legal system under this theme. There was a lack of awareness about the possibility of malware and cyberattacks. At present, the judicial system doesn't accept digital records as valid evidence, which puts an extra burden on FDOs owing to maintaining duplicate records, i.e., paper-based and digital.

Conventional Vis-a-Vis MIS System

FDOs and officers both endorsed the fact that the investigation process has been substantially improved because of the lesser time required for records' verification. The system has allowed swift registration of FIRs and ease in tracking and reviewing complaints launched on the portal. The introduction of MIS has improved accountability and transparency; however, corruption has not been fully mitigated. Some of the respondents reported better conviction rates, while others reported no change or decline, but the same was not substantiated through the data. Another important finding was that progress on digitization is linked to the priorities and interests of senior officers.

Findings of Public Interviews

At present, there is a lack of awareness among the general public about the online complaint system, and they still rely mostly on personal visits to police stations for complaint registration. Few respondents, who had actually registered an online complaint, were satisfied with its performance. Although most respondents informed us about the prompt initial response, there were issues with follow-up after the initial registration of complaints. The public acknowledged that the installation of security cameras has improved transparency; nonetheless, the culture of bribery still persists.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The policymakers have taken the right steps towards digitization and automation in the IP with a financial overlay of Rs. 704 million. Our research has found that digitization has shown its utility and substantially improved the policing of ICT; however, a few teething problems still remain that need to be addressed. After having gone through the research process, the following policy measures are recommended that would further enhance the process:

Congruence with the Legal System

The requisite laws need to be passed by Parliament to allow digital records to be admissible in court as evidence. This single step would substantially facilitate the prosecution process and subsequently reduce crime. Moreover, it would reduce the inherent friction in the police against digitization as they would see its actual utility in prosecuting criminals.

Drive from the Top

The police is a hierarchical organization, and any change in any such organization has to be introduced from top to bottom. The top management in the police department needs to make digitization a top priority and a command goal. They should start setting project goals with strict timelines that should be vigorously implemented. Separate KPIs should be set for police officers with regards to their contribution to digitization as an output.

Formulation of Big Data.

At present, digitization in the police is being implemented in Punjab and ICT only. The same needs to be replicated in the remaining provinces with an interlinked system to formulate a database of police records for the entire country. This would allow each province's police to access the criminal database of the remaining provinces and facilitate swift identification and apprehension of criminals.

Efficient Human Resource Management

FDOs are the prime drivers of the digitization process, and their effective human resource management would expedite its smooth implementation. A comprehensive regime for FDOs should be formulated in which they should be incentivized for good performance through promotions and other incentives. The regime should cover the balanced gender composition of FDOs as per area requirements and provide them with dedicated work spaces at each police station. Owing to the development of a user-friendly system, no issues with respect to training the system emerged; however, the same needs to be reemphasized through frequent refreshers and on-the-job training.

Inculcating Cultural Shift

There is friction with technology, and the Islamabad Police is hesitant to use this system, which is being relegated to FDOs only. Resultantly, there is a demand for dedicated manpower for digitization, which is against the spirit of digitization. The same cannot be mitigated without introducing a cultural shift by enforcing the use of technology by the entire police force. An important enabler in this regard would be processing routine police correspondence digitally on existing intranet infrastructure. This step would nudge the police force towards digitization and acceptance of technology.

Intranet Availability and Security Concerns

At present, police are using the MIS on the internet as their primary means of communication, which has serious security issues and is susceptible to denial of service and other cyberattacks. In all organizations, the internet is used as a private intranet, which entails a substantial financial overlay.

In the case of Islamabad Police, a rugged intranet system is already available at 20 out of 24 police stations for safe city cameras, which can be easily used to operate the MIS as well. Therefore, the intranet facility should be extended to all police stations, and the MIS system should be operated mainly on the intranet to enhance the cyber security of the system. The Internet should be a secondary means of accessing databases and should be sparingly used.

Awareness Drive for the General Public

The research has highlighted the lack of information among the general public about CMS. Moreover, the users of the CMS system were generally satisfied with its performance and gave positive reviews, which necessitates raising awareness among the general public about its availability and providing information about its usage. Towards this end, there should be a concerted media campaign to inform the general public about its availability and how to use it through online video tutorials.