

Creating safer communities in Bangladesh



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JUNE 2011



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Acknowledgements

This document was written for Saferworld by Adam Drury with technical advice and comments from Chamila Hemmathagama and Neila Husain. It provides a summary of work undertaken between 2008 and 2011 by Saferworld and its partners, ChangeMaker and BRAC, in Bangladesh. All three organisations contributed to this document. Special thanks go to Rosy Cave and Evelyn Vancollie at Saferworld for their advice and contributions to this report. At BRAC thanks go to Anna Minj, Kazi Nazrul Fattah, Kallol Barua, Nurul Islam, SHM Khairul Alam, Kazi Masudur Rahaman and Harunar Rashid; at ChangeMaker thanks go to Syed Tamjid Ur Rahman, Syed Tayubur Rahman, Saidur Reza and Abdul Karim Bahuiyan. Finally, thanks go to all those people living and working in the communities in Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar who have made these projects possible by contributing their time, effort and enthusiasm. This report was designed by Jane Stevenson and copy-edited by Eleanor Gordon.

We are grateful to the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Norway for financially supporting this publication and the community security initiative. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Saferworld.

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1

Creating safer communities in Bangladesh

Introduction

Human security is often said to consist of two elements – freedom from fear, and freedom from want. In Bangladesh, many of the most obvious development challenges relate to freedom from want – unemployment, poverty, food insecurity and lack of education and healthcare. But these are intertwined with serious challenges relating to freedom from fear – political and criminal violence, abuse of women and children and violence related to drug and alcohol abuse. In fact, separating threats to ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, and identifying what makes a community ‘safe’, is never an easy task. In different contexts, the real and perceived safety of individuals and communities may be undermined by anything from poverty to criminal gangs, from unemployment to drug abuse.

Ultimately, effective understanding of and responses to issues of safety and security depend on giving ownership of the process to the community themselves. In partnership with the state bodies responsible for security, justice and other basic services, they are best placed to identify the major threats to their own safety, and devise practical steps to address these. This insight is not a new one, and recent years have seen an increase in participatory and community-based approaches to issues like policing, small arms control and crime prevention. However, coherent approaches to working with communities to improve safety and security are still needed.

For a number of years, Saferworld has been working in several fragile or post-conflict countries to develop a broad-based ‘community security’ approach. This aims to bring communities together with local authorities and security providers to build a safer environment

at the local level and to influence change at the national policy level. This approach not only helps to address the most pressing and immediate safety concerns of community members, it also builds the confidence, structures and links with formal institutions that can enable preventive action on further problems in the future.

This publication brings together the learning and experience that Saferworld and its civil society partners have gained from community security initiatives in Bangladesh between 2008 and 2011. It is based on project documents, interviews with communities, civil society, local government officials, police and project staff and two evaluations conducted in 2008 and 2011. Section one gives an overview of the context in Bangladesh, as well as a summary of the community security approach used by Saferworld and its partners. Section 2 presents detailed case studies of sites in Kishoreganj district where BRAC was the implementing partner, and in Kamrangirchar, a slum in Dhaka, where the implementing partner was ChangeMaker. These case studies set out how the methodology has worked in practice, and include a rich set of challenges faced and lessons learnt, which may be helpful in designing similar interventions elsewhere.

Bangladesh – the national context

Chittagong Hill Tracts

a hilly region in the south east of Bangladesh. The region has suffered violent conflict between ethnic Bengalis and indigenous ethnic groups, particularly over land ownership, since the 1970s. This conflict was officially brought to an end in 1997 with a peace agreement. However, sporadic incidents of violence and tensions continue.

Bangladesh has not suffered open warfare since the country was created in 1971 after a bloody war of independence from Pakistan. Nevertheless, it is a country that faces serious security threats. At the national level, ongoing tensions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the threat posed by political and religious extremist groups, human trafficking and smuggling of drugs and small arms are all of concern. It is at the community level, however, that some of the most pervasive threats to human security are apparent. These relate both to freedom from fear and from want, with the two often interlinked. Communities face issues including violent crime, gender-based violence, political violence, insecurity arising from drug and alcohol abuse and, in some areas, a high incidence of child abuse and abduction. High levels of poverty and unemployment are seen as contributing to many of these challenges, while physical insecurities at the community level also have the potential to undermine economic and social development.

The current national government is led by the Awami League (AL), while the opposition is led by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). The two parties have alternated in power for many years – apart from a two-year interlude in 2007/8 when there was a military-backed technocratic caretaker government. National politics are characterised by a high degree of tension, and strikes (*hartal*) and political protests are common.

In theory, this national political contest should not directly affect community-level security, as local government structures are nominally separate from national politics. The primary level of local government is the *Union Parishad* (UP), each of which consists of several wards. Unions are grouped into *Upazila* (sub-districts) and then Districts, but there are no

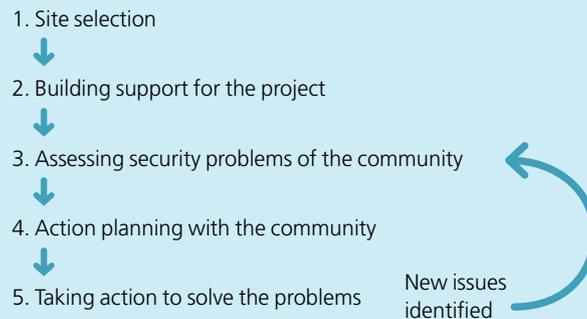
elected bodies at these purely administrative levels. In practice, *UP* elections and politics reflect the national contest, so that when a new government comes to power, there is often turnover at the *UP* level. This can mean programmes stuck in limbo, policies reversed, or even acts of violence directed at previous local political leaders. Other local bodies of political significance include the *shalish* or *ponchayet* dispute resolution mechanisms, which are usually exclusively male and dominated by local elites. In slum areas of major cities, organised criminal groups and *mastaan* (local strongmen) often receive political patronage.

The primary state security provider at the community level is the Bangladesh Police. Since 2005, within the framework of a national Police Reform Programme (PRP), there have been attempts to further develop the police into a modern, consent-based service. One aspect of the PRP is a community policing strategy, which includes setting up community policing forums in every community to help police engage with community concerns.

A practical approach to community security

The work of Saferworld on community security in Bangladesh has drawn on previous experience in South Eastern Europe. Starting in 2005, Saferworld worked with local partners to implement community security processes in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia. The principles, benefits, utility and detailed methodology of the approach taken in those projects are set out in detail in the 2006 publication *Creating safer communities: Lessons from South Eastern Europe* (available from www.saferworld.org.uk). The approach developed in South Eastern Europe was used as a guide, but was reviewed and adapted to fit the specific Bangladeshi context. This section summarises the methodology Saferworld and implementing partners used for community security processes in Bangladesh.

Box 1: Stages of the community security process in Bangladesh



The Saferworld approach uses some of the ‘participatory rural appraisal’ tools and other participatory approaches to social and economic development, and applies them to the field

of community security. Consequently, the approach is people-focused, encouraging local ownership and the engagement of all groups within the community. It is also an intensive and time-intensive process, requiring regular, in-depth engagement by implementing organisations, as well as enthusiasm, motivation and commitment from community members. Below is a short summary of the methodology used in Bangladesh.

Principles Saferworld's approach to community security in Bangladesh is guided by some underlying principles. They are listed alphabetically, not in order of importance:

- **Accountability** of the implementing organisation to the community
- **Capacity building** of the local community and institutions
- **Collaboration** between communities, security and service providers
- **Community/local leadership and ownership** of the project helps make it more sustainable and effective – local people need to take the lead in identifying and resolving their security problems
- **Community participation**, with other actors (e.g. non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community organisations, the business community, teachers, local government authorities, police) as facilitators and supporters
- **Context/conflict sensitivity** at each stage of the process
- **Empowerment and inclusivity**, with marginalised groups given a voice. In particular, the empowerment of women and youth is an integral part of the process
- **Flexibility and adaptability** – circumstances will change over time, and new challenges may emerge, which the process needs to be able to adapt to
- **Honesty and integrity** – implementing organisations must do what they promise and manage community expectations
- **Impartiality**, with targeting based on need, not bias
- **Relevance** – interventions need to have a credible theory of change, allowing communities to make real changes to their circumstances
- **Strategic planning** of action based on analysis of local problems
- **Sustainability** of outcomes through empowerment and capacity building, so that communities are not dependent on implementing agencies – local ownership both contributes to, and is strengthened by, sustainability
- **Targeting** – setting realistic targets for improving safety, and selecting security problems that can be addressed within the scope of the project – the community need to understand from the outset what can realistically be achieved through the project
- **Transparency** – full information available to the community at all times.

Experience in Bangladesh has particularly underlined the importance of the following aspects of this set of principles, which are explained in more detail below.

Sustainability Community security projects were set up in 2008 in two locations (Hajirgol village, Kishoreganj, and ward 5, Kamrangirchar). These projects have continued to date without constant donor funding. Although this has presented challenges, it has also shown that Saferworld's community security approach can produce sustainable change. One key element in this success has been the creation, through the project, of informal community institutions – youth groups, regular public meetings, and action committees. These are small groups of committed community members who take a leadership role in implementing the plans developed by the community to tackle security issues (also called the 'executive committee' in some sites). These provide a space in which members of the community can discuss and find ways to resolve their problems. As community confidence and capacity develops, these spaces can be used to tackle more complex challenges, and to build closer relationships with local authorities, police and other security service providers.

Community/local leadership and ownership of the project has been the essential pre-requisite for long-term sustainability. At one level, the development of a strong, community-led process for identifying and tackling security problems, which can be sustained without outside support, is more important than the specific results achieved during the project. Developing this kind of ownership, however, has required sustained engagement and support from the implementing organisation, to overcome initial suspicion, provide training and build confidence. In the case of Kishoreganj, most of the activities undertaken by the community did not require financial support, relying instead on local engagement and community members' willingness to give their time and effort. Where ongoing financial support has been required, for example for the Child Safety Centre in Kamrangirchar, local ownership has helped build financial sustainability. In this case, financial sustainability has been secured, in large part, by the agreement of the parents whose children attend the centre to pay an affordable daily fee for the centre, which covers a substantial portion of the costs. The community have also supported the centre with in-kind donations, funding through *zakat* religious taxes, and support from local businesses. None of this would be possible without the deep commitment and proactive engagement of local community members.

Flexibility and adaptability The different experiences of ChangeMaker in Kamrangirchar and BRAC in Kishoreganj have shown that one of the strengths of the community security approach taken by Saferworld and implementing organisations is its flexibility. The two contexts are extremely different, not least because of the contrast between a dense urban slum with a rapidly changing population and a rural area with an agricultural economy. Accordingly, the problems identified and the solutions devised by the communities, differed widely. In Kishoreganj, the focus has been on behaviour change and raising awareness, whereas in Kamrangirchar there has been demand for new services, and a focus on improving employment and socio-economic conditions. The approach set out here accommodated these differences successfully, and significant impacts were achieved in both locations.

Stages of the process

As outlined in box 1, the community security process applied in Bangladesh consists of a series of inter-linked stages. The creation of sustainable community systems, as discussed above, should mean that communities continue to repeat stages 3 to 5, as new problems are identified, solutions to them planned and these plans put into action.

1. Site selection

A combination of methods was used to select appropriate communities, including desk research, surveys and interviews. A clear set of agreed criteria was formulated, to ensure the process was fair and transparent. This is particularly important when selecting pilot sites, although if the project is scaled up at a later date the criteria for selection may need to be relaxed or altered. Implementing partners in Bangladesh used the following criteria:

- There is unmet community demand for improved safety and security, but the needs are not too severe to be addressed within the scope of the project.
- There is community interest in supporting collective action to improve safety and security.
- The project has the potential to make a substantial difference to community security.
- Local government administration is supportive or, at least, not obstructive.
- There is potential for linkages with formal safety and security providers.
- Local implementing agency staff are efficient and able to implement the project.
- There are relatively good transportation facilities and access to them.
- There is a strong *polli shomaj* (grassroots level women's federation of the poor) in the project site (relevant to BRAC only).

2. Building support

Once a site was selected, community members, local authorities and other key stakeholders, such as the police and local elites, were approached to seek approval and build support. This could take the form of community discussions or meetings with particular individuals who act as gatekeepers. In both sites, these discussions also provided an opportunity to begin conversations about local safety and security concerns, and to identify motivated individuals who might be willing to play a more proactive role in the project. In both areas, but particularly in Kamrangirchar, security issues are an extremely sensitive topic for community members to discuss publicly. In this context, being prepared to spend additional time building the trust of communities in the implementing organisations, and explaining the aim of the project to help communities identify and address their problems, was central to the success of the project.

3. Assessing community security problems

The next stage is to facilitate a participatory process through which the community can identify and assess the key safety and security problems that they face. Facilitated focus group discussions are the key tool at this stage. It was found useful to hold these separately

Popular theatre BRAC organises small theatre groups of local people. Their performances are participatory, with the audience asked for their opinions and advice throughout. The plots focus on local issues, in this case enabling community members to discuss their security problems together. In Kishoreganj, this proved a useful complement to focus group discussions, eliciting views from people who were otherwise reluctant to speak.

with men, women, young people (in this context, this includes people aged from early teens to mid-twenties) and other key groups such as business people and local elites. In both project locations, problems were also assessed through in-depth interviews with key informants, usually a long-term resident of the area. BRAC also used their participatory ‘popular theatre’ methodology to engender discussion of safety issues among the community. For many community members, this stage was the first opportunity to discuss their safety concerns. This required careful facilitation, especially given the tendency for the voices of certain groups (especially women and young people) to be ignored. Holding separate meetings with these segments of the community was also found to be useful.

4. Action planning

When asked to list their security and safety problems community members generated long lists. Consequently, some prioritisation was necessary in order to focus the project on a smaller number of achievable goals. In both Kamrangirchar and Kishoreganj, a two-part community workshop was used. The first part constituted a validation workshop, examining the lists of security issues raised by the community and confirming an agreed list of priority issues. In the second part, community members, supported by the implementing organisation, began to develop an action plan to resolve the priority issues. At this stage, a small ‘action committee’ of community members was established to oversee the implementation of the action plan. This stage was particularly challenging, and required sensitive facilitation, as the prioritisation of specific problems often exposed differences of opinion that needed to be resolved to develop a shared action plan.

5. Taking action

With the action plans developed, and responsibilities assigned to community members, action committees and implementing organisations, the next stage was to put the plan into practice. Experience has shown that the key to success is to build momentum, so securing some quick results – even if relatively minor – can be important. In Hajirgol village in Kishoreganj, for example, one key action was to build bathing shelters at the riverside for women. This was accomplished very quickly and successfully, and helped build the momentum of the project. Regular meetings of the action group or executive committee, and close engagement of the implementing organisation, also proved useful.

In many cases, the action plans were implemented with great success. In some respect, though, the more significant successes were when community members spontaneously returned to stage three, identified new problems, and began to work together to resolve them. This usually took place through the informal groups and community institutions set up to oversee the implementation of the initial plans, and so getting this early stage right is vital to long-term sustainability. It is for this reason that process is stressed in this approach, even above specific outcomes. If the community security project is genuinely successful, it will embed a process that enables communities to tackle their problems, in collaboration with local authorities and security providers, without support from an external agency.

6. Monitoring and evaluation and sharing lessons learnt

Implementation of the Bangladesh community security projects has been a learning process, intended as pilots of an approach that could be rolled out on a larger scale in the future. The Bangladesh community security projects have been regularly monitored and evaluated by Saferworld and implementing partners. The target communities have fed into this process and the findings and lessons learnt have been shared with a wider group of stakeholders in Bangladesh. In 2008, a thorough evaluation of the two initial sites was carried out, and the lessons from that stage fed into the development of the new project sites in 2010. This report summarises some of the lessons learnt so far in both the original and new sites, and aims to be useful for increasing the impact of this approach in Bangladesh, as well as for other organisations or countries designing similar interventions.

Principles

The community security projects described in this document were initially conceived as pilot sites. The next question is how these can be scaled up to have a larger impact and benefit more communities in Bangladesh. In both Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar, neighbouring communities have expressed interest in similar programmes, and there is also the potential to work at a national scale by integrating this approach into an existing national programme on community policing. The clear lesson from the experience so far is that when communities are able to take ownership of their own safety and security, and to co-operate with the state institutions responsible for providing security, they can make substantial changes to their environment.

2

Case studies

Community security projects were set up in 2008 in one urban and one rural area. The urban site was in Kamrangirchar slum, Dhaka (led by ChangeMaker) and the rural site was in Kishoreganj district (led by BRAC). In 2010, two additional sites were added in each location. Saferworld provided funding to cover meetings, workshops and associated expenses, as well as a small fund to help communities implement their action plans. The following case studies examine the two locations, setting out the local context before describing the process, results, challenges faced and lessons learnt. An action plan is included as an example of what was produced by community security process discussions. The two locations are very different – Kishoreganj is a farming district in the rural heartlands of Bangladesh, whilst Kamrangirchar is a dense urban slum with a transient, dynamic population mostly working in low-paid jobs in the city. Nevertheless, the fact that communities in both locations were able to make a real difference to their safety and security is testament both to the flexibility of this approach and to the capacity and resilience of Bangladeshi communities.

Hajirgol, Bhatgaon and Rashidabad villages, Kishoreganj district



Members of the *polli shomaj* and female youth group members meet to discuss community security, Bhatgaon village, Kishoreganj district, March 2011.

ADAM DRURY

Community background

Kishoreganj district is a predominantly rural area about 150 kilometres north-east of Dhaka, covering nearly 2,700km². The area is fairly typical of the rural heartlands of Bangladesh. Outside of the main town (also called Kishoreganj), the district consists of densely packed villages and farmland – rice paddies, orchards, fish ponds and fields of other crops, such as wheat. Most people's livelihoods rely on agriculture. The population is almost entirely Muslim, with very small Hindu and Christian minorities. The level of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy is high. Neither the local government nor NGOs have any history of working on community security issues in Kishoreganj. However, in common with many areas of Bangladesh, community policing forums were set up throughout the district in 2008/9. These were intended to help address local safety and security issues. Despite some successes elsewhere, community members in the project sites felt that these forums were not very effective.

The community security projects in Kishoreganj were implemented by BRAC, a very large Bangladeshi NGO working on a wide range of issues from micro-credit to social development. Community security projects took place in three villages in the area – Hajirgol, Rashidabad and Bhatgaon.

Hajirgol is a village of about 8,500 people, in ward 2 of Maijkapon Union, about 5km from Kishoreganj town. It is relatively poor, and with a literacy rate of 28 percent, education is below average for the district. Rashidabad and Bhatgaon, by contrast, are somewhat better off, with good quality roads and agricultural land and higher levels of education and literacy – the large number of girls attending school is particularly notable. Rashidabad has a population of around 8,000 whilst Bhatgaon is a little smaller at around 5,000. They are neighbouring villages, in wards 6 and 2 of Rashidabad Union, respectively, situated about 7km from Kishoreganj town.

There has been no major violent or political conflict in Kishoreganj since the War of Independence in 1971. Nevertheless, all three villages face high levels of insecurity and interpersonal violence. Family feuds, violence against women, theft and violent disagreements over money are common, as is sexual harassment ('eve teasing', or *joino hoirani* in Bangla) of such severity that it regularly leads to girls dropping out of school and marrying early, and has on occasion caused suicides. Gambling and drug use are also prevalent. In a context of extreme poverty, gamblers and drug users quickly use up their families' limited income, and domestic violence and theft are often the direct result. The most common drugs are cannabis and illicit locally-distilled alcohol, but heroin and phensidyl (a cough medicine containing high levels of codeine) are also widely used. There is often a high level of mistrust between local people and the police and UP. Local people generally do not trust either the police or UP, perceiving them to be corrupt and unreliable. Community members feel that police do not always take strong action against local criminals. Gambling and the drug trade are often protected by members of the local elite or politicians who are profiting from these activities.

Eve teasing sexual harassment and abuse of girls and young women, often by groups of young men in public places. It is also known as *jouno hoirani* in Bangla. The term is controversial, because it appears to trivialise a serious problem. In Bangladesh, this kind of abuse in the form of teasing and stalking often leads to girls dropping out of school and marrying young, and has been known to cause suicide. In this report, we use the term 'sexual harassment' to refer to this.

Polli shomaj a village-level federation of poor women, set up by BRAC in thousands of villages across Bangladesh. They are involved in a variety of BRAC's programmes, from micro-credit to improving healthcare. In all three villages discussed here, the *polli shomaj* has also taken a leading role in improving community security.

Community security project

In 2008, Saferworld and BRAC started a community security pilot project in Hajirgol village. Over three months, BRAC mobilised support, conducted group meetings and helped the community develop an action plan. Since then, the community has continued working to implement this plan, with occasional support from BRAC in terms of training, funding for particular activities, and liaison with the police and local authorities. In 2010, the community security work was extended to Bhatgaon and Rashidabad villages. This has now been running for around six months, and has followed the same process as in Hajirgol.

In each location, BRAC helped the community assess and prioritise the safety issues affecting them. To do this, they carried out key informant interviews and staged participatory shows by their popular local theatre group, as well as organising group discussions with young men, young women, the *polli shomaj*, (male) community leaders and service providers. Building on these, an action committee was appointed that worked with BRAC's support to develop an action plan tackling the identified priority issues. Members of the action committee, as well as young people and *polli shomaj* members, were given training to help them understand and address safety issues. As well as working with the community itself, BRAC approached the police and local authorities to get their support for the project.

In implementing the community security project in Kishoreganj, BRAC drew extensively on the abilities of the existing *polli shomaj*. In all three villages, the *polli shomaj* worked alongside the action committee throughout the process, and there was some overlap in membership of the two bodies. Involving the *polli shomaj* in this way made the project more effective, and helped ensure that women's voices were central to the whole process. This helped to empower and create leadership roles for women who are generally marginalised within their communities.

Priority issues and action plans

Through discussions, key informant interviews and theatre productions, community members raised a wide range of safety and security concerns including: dangerous traffic and railway lines, a feeling of insecurity after sunset due to the lack of electricity, and theft. However, at the action planning stage, all three communities identified the following issues as priorities:

1. Sexual harassment of young girls, leading to humiliation, girls dropping out of school, and occasionally committing suicide
2. High levels of gambling, linked to theft and domestic violence, principally against women and children
3. Abuse of drugs and alcohol, linked to theft and domestic violence

In Hajirgol, an additional specific form of sexual harassment was identified as a priority concern:

4. Harassment of women as they bathe in the river

In Rashidabad and Bhatgaon, a different problem was highlighted:

5. Village shops showing DVDs of a violent and adult nature throughout the day, leading to children skipping school – and adults skipping work – to watch the films. This has a negative impact on education, moral values, as well as on household incomes.

With support from BRAC, the communities then formulated action plans to address these problems in co-operation with the police and local authorities:

1. Raise awareness of the negative impacts of sexual harassment, drug abuse and gambling through group discussions and a public campaign, including popular theatre shows
2. Directly challenge these behaviours by speaking to the individuals involved, their families and teachers, to alert them to the negative effects of their actions and to the legal punishments they could face
3. Improve links with the local police and help them to prevent and punish sexual harassment, gambling and drug abuse
4. In Hajirgol, construct shelters or bathing enclaves (as they were called) with the help of volunteers (men, women and youth) at key points on the riverside, so that women can bathe in privacy
5. In Rashidabad and Bhatgaon, work with the committee of shopkeepers who oversee the market to restrict the showing of DVDs to certain times of day, out of school and work hours so as to minimise the identified adverse effects.

It is worth noting that all three communities prioritised very similar issues, and came up with much the same action plans to tackle them. Although the villages are far from identical, it is evident that many key safety issues are shared throughout this area of rural Bangladesh.

Rashidabad village action plan

Site: Rashidabad village, Kishoreganj

Objective: Reduce gambling

Action	Time frame	Group responsible
Facilitators to discuss the issues of gambling with community members	Weekly before Friday prayer	Action committee will form small discussion groups with youth, women, elites etc.
Speak to local imams, and ask them to speak about the negative effects of gambling	Fridays	Action committee
Imams to address negative effects of gambling in their Friday sermons	Fridays	Imams of local mosques
Raise awareness among young people about negative impacts of gambling	Continuous – regular meetings	Youth group
Discuss the issue with the parents, guardians and families of gamblers	Continuous	Action committee, youth group and <i>polli shomaj</i>
Speak directly to gamblers, and educate them about its negative effects	Continuous	Action committee, youth group and <i>polli shomaj</i>
If needed, take particular cases to the local police	When necessary	Action committee

Steps taken

Residents in each village established an ‘action committee’ of between 12 and 20 members, to oversee the implementation of the action plans, which met once or twice a month. These generally consisted of a range of community members, including both local elites (religious figures, school teachers) and non-elites. The intention was to achieve 50 percent female membership, but in general around a quarter of the members were women. Youth groups were also formed for teenagers (roughly 12–17) and young adults (around 17–24), which helped implement the plans. The existing *polli shomaj* in each village also carried out community security work, working alongside the action committee to oversee the process.

“Before, every corner in the village had young and old people openly gambling and taking drugs, right in the community. Things have changed a lot now.”

Member of Bhatgaon action committee

Raising awareness

The action committees, youth groups and *polli shomaj* all carried out public events and small group discussions to raise awareness in their communities of the negative consequences of sexual harassment, gambling and drug abuse. This included highlighting the links to violence, theft and girls dropping out of school, as well as the legal consequences, such as fines and short prison terms, which can result from these illegal activities. This awareness-raising was supported by intensive training provided by BRAC at BRAC Centre, which helped committee members develop a better understanding of the issues as well as the skills needed to explain these to others. This has also enabled community members to move beyond the original action plan, and begin raising awareness of additional issues, such as dowry-related domestic abuse.

Awareness-raising discussions were sometimes followed by performances by BRAC's popular theatre group of local people. These take the form of a short play dramatising key issues, such as the impact of drug abuse on domestic violence, and include audience participation at key points. For example, when a character has to make an important decision in the play, they will ask the audience what to do. This helps the community to explore the issues, for example discussing the importance of addressing problems together, rather than condemning one individual for their involvement.

Challenging sexual harassment, gambling and drug abuse

As well as raising awareness, the action committees, youth groups and *polli shomaj* directly challenged gambling, drug abuse and sexual harassment when they occurred. In Hajirgol, for example, the female members of the youth group regularly go as a group to speak to men who sexually harass girls, to ask them to stop and to explain the consequences. In Bhatgaon the *polli shomaj* as a group approach gamblers and drug dealers, to explain to them why they need to cease these activities. They said that some of their members had challenged drug dealers in this way in the past, and had been threatened with violence. However, they said that working as a group has made them more confident and their interventions more effective. Such efforts are also enabled by the confidence that community members gained by participating in BRAC training sessions.

Improving co-operation with the police

Communications with the police were established through the *UP* and *dophadors* (village-based police heads), as well as through BRAC's existing relationship with the local police stations. In 2008, it was also possible to work through the community policing forum, but this has since become practically defunct. The police were invited to awareness-raising events to explain the legal consequences of activities such as sexual harassment. The police also agreed to conduct more regular inspections of key locations for gambling and drug abuse. In 2009, the district police superintendent attended the inaugural event for the Hajirgol community centre, which had been built as part of the village's community security

process. He expressed his support for the community security work, as well as promised police assistance. Unfortunately, he has now moved on to a new post, and it has taken considerable time and effort to begin building a similarly constructive relationship with his successor.

Harassment at bathing spots

The action committee and *polli shomaj* in Hajirgol worked to mobilise the wider community to set up bathing shelters. People contributed according to their ability, some giving free labour while others provided bamboo and other building materials, or food for those carrying out the work. The women of the village identified a total of six locations along the river Narsunda where shelters would be useful. The community built bamboo shelters at all six locations, which are removed during the dry season and replaced during the rains, when the river is used for bathing.

Village shops showing inappropriate DVDs

The Bhatgaon and Rashidabad action committees approached stallholders and their market committees, and explained the negative effects of showing violent and adult DVDs at all hours of the day. In co-operation with the market committee, it was agreed that DVDs would only be shown in the evenings, after school and work had finished, so as to minimise the identified adverse effects.

Community centre

All three villages decided to construct community centres to facilitate community security work. The centres are intended to provide a place for meetings of the action committee, youth group and *polli shomaj*, as well as gatherings of the wider community. The intention is that they also provide a recreational space for young people, which will be first of its kind and which could hopefully serve as an alternative to sexual harassment, drug use and gambling. In Hajirgol, the centre was built in 2009 on land donated by a local resident and with funding from BRAC and Saferworld. In Bhatgaon and Rashidabad, land has been donated for similar centres and building work will begin soon.

Results achieved

Reduction of sexual harassment and improved position of women in society

- Sexual harassment has been dramatically reduced. In Hajirgol, men, women and youth said that the project had cut sexual harassment to a fraction of its previous level. In Bhatgaon and Rashidabad, the action committee said that there was now virtually no sexual harassment taking place. Young women in all three villages said that they now felt much more confident in going to school free from harassment.

- In Hajirgol, the reduction in sexual harassment has been sustained since 2008. This was ascribed to the fact that the young men of the village now understand the negative impact that it has, as a result of awareness-raising through the community security project.
- Six bathing shelters for women were constructed by the River Narsunda in Hajirgol, as a result of which women can bathe without fear of harassment by men.
- The position of marginalised groups – especially women – has improved through their engagement in tackling safety problems. Women and girls have become more confident in speaking publicly about their problems, and challenging men (including husbands, sons and brothers) about their behaviour. The youth of the communities are also taken seriously by the elders and this has encouraged them into more responsibility sharing within the community.

Reduction of gambling and drug abuse

- Gambling and drug abuse have been noticeably reduced. In Hajirgol, community members said these problems were reduced dramatically between 2008 and early 2010, although there has been a recent resurgence, as will be discussed shortly (under challenges encountered). In Rashidabad and Bhatgaon, most people felt it was too early to tell what the overall reduction had been, but said that at least now these things were not taking place openly in the community. *Polli shomaj* members noted that domestic abuse related to gambling and drug abuse had decreased sharply.
- The land owners of two key sites for gambling in Hajirgol – a banana orchard and an abandoned house – agreed to stop allowing their property to be used for gambling.
- In Rashidabad, a popular theatre show led a local man – notorious for gambling, and then beating his wife to force her to hand over money – to attend a community meeting where he promised to stop these activities. A local politician has also stopped his own gambling activities, and removed his protection from other gamblers and drug dealers.
- In Rashidabad and Bhatgaon, the police arrested some key individuals involved in gambling and drug dealing. They were released on conditional bail by the police, having paid a fixed sum as a guarantee of their future conduct.
- In Rashidabad and Bhatgaon, shop owners agreed to restrict the showing of DVDs to the evenings, removing the risk of young children being exposed to inappropriate content contained in adult or violent films.

Increased community ability to tackle security issues

- Community participation in identifying and addressing issues affecting their own safety has improved. There is a high degree of motivation, especially among youth groups, and intention to address further problems, such as dowry-related violence.

- Community members have become much more proactive in addressing the problems that they see in their communities. In a recent example, a man was planning to marry his under-age daughter to a local farmer. The youth group discussed the issue with the parties involved, leading to the marriage being cancelled.
- Several individuals said that BRAC training had helped them become more confident in discussing community problems, and to take more responsibility for their own actions. Several members of the youth group in Hajirgol used to be involved themselves in sexual harassment and gambling, but have now stopped because they have become aware of the negative impacts.
- Community confidence has improved by acting jointly on safety issues. This has allowed people in Hajirgol, for instance, to protest against local corruption for the first time.

Improved community-police relations

- Community members now take their problems to the police and other service providers more regularly. They also actively claim their rights from local authorities, something that they previously felt unable to do.
- The police have begun to visit the villages more regularly and listen to local problems. The previous district superintendent was very supportive, even giving out his own mobile phone number so that he could be contacted whenever necessary. For some time after the project began in Hajirgol, the police carried out regular inspections of local gambling sites.

Challenges encountered

- **Building sustainability** In Hajirgol, BRAC have been able to provide only occasional support over the last two years, and this has led to a gradual decrease in effectiveness. Community members said that gambling and drug abuse – which fell dramatically when the project began in 2008 – have recently returned to something approaching their original level. Saferworld and project partners have only been able to provide support to communities in Bangladesh for 6–12 months at a time due to funding limitations. Although good results have been achieved, it was generally felt that at least three years of intensive support in terms of training, confidence building and support on particular crises would be needed to make community security efforts self-sustaining.
- **Time and resource demands** Building community awareness and support, engaging their enthusiasm and maintaining the momentum of the community security process have all required a considerable investment of time by BRAC staff. Particularly at the start of the process, a lot of staff time was required to develop a relationship of trust with community members. Close engagement over a long period of time has also been needed. All of this means that the staff-resource requirements of a successful community security process are very high.

“If the community is strong and united, the interference from external actors won’t stop them.”

BRAC staff

- **Handling local elites** This project empowered poor people to take the lead in tackling problems, but this was uncomfortable for some local elites, who are used to being in charge and to being asked to adjudicate disputes. This has required careful handling – in particular engaging the support of *UP* members who could otherwise cause serious problems. In order to do this, the key groups and dynamics in the local political economy need to be thoroughly understood, and a rapid assessment of the context at the start of the project is a key tool for this.
- **Opposition from some local politicians** Some local politicians actively opposed the community security projects, usually because they were personally involved in gambling and drug abuse. In Hajirgol, for example, the action committee faced direct political interference, particularly early on in the project, that has limited their ability to act and reduced the support they get from the police.
- **Threats and persecution** Several people involved in drug dealing and gambling made threats against those involved in the community security projects. In some cases, they also had them arrested by the police on trumped-up charges. In Rashidabad, this kind of persecution led to the collapse of a campaign against gambling undertaken several years ago, separate from the community security process. However, the support, legitimacy and links to the police provided by BRAC have made people more confident when facing such threats.
- **Maintaining good relations with the police** All three communities have always found it challenging to develop good relations with the police. Although this improved markedly at the start of the project – especially in Hajirgol – it has been challenging to maintain a strong relationship as senior officers have moved on to new posts. When relations with and support from the police have faltered, many of the problems tackled by the project have resurfaced, for example leading to a resurgence in gambling and drug dealing. The community policing forum also became less effective over time. Many community members felt that only ongoing help from BRAC could ensure the police stayed engaged. Building the confidence and capacity of the communities to engage directly with the police, and *vice versa*, is a major challenge, but central to sustainable improvements in community security.
- **Involving women** Women’s position in the community has been strengthened by their involvement in community security work, but it is still very subordinate. The aim of having 50 percent women in all groups, training and activities was rarely met, and the police still do not always take women seriously when they report crimes. There are few – if any – female police officers in the local *thana*.
- **Tackling underlying problems** Community members emphasised that the ultimate root of many of their safety problems is unemployment, but addressing this is beyond the immediate scope of this project. There may be a need for more explicit links to longer-term development and job-creation programmes.

- **Managing spill-over effects** Dealing with community security in one village in isolation presents several problems. Problems such as gambling were, in some cases, displaced to neighbouring villages. Girls continued to face harassment when they passed through other areas. Drug dealers from other areas worked to oppose the campaign against drug abuse. Scaling up the project may mitigate some of these issues.

Lessons learnt

“Before, we felt that to tackle gambling we needed a stick to make people listen. With BRAC’s support, we no longer need the stick.”

Member of Rashidabad youth group

- **Working as a community** Many community members said that they had previously tried to tackle some of the safety problems that affected them through individual action, with little result. By contrast, working together as a community gave them the legitimacy and support to have a significant impact. Overcoming community security problems depended principally on joint community action, which also builds the capacity to tackle other problems in the future. One of the key achievements of the community security intervention (as identified in the 2008 evaluation of the project) has been developing and embedding this community-led process, which has minimised the need for outside funding and helped create sustainability.
- **Ownership of the problems** Successes also relied on seeing the various problems as communal issues rather than the fault of particular individuals. Community members said that there was a temptation to blame the individuals involved in gambling, drugs or sexual harassment, and to ostracise them. However, with support from BRAC they recognised that this could polarise the community, and that including these people in the community security process could make it more effective. Accordingly, when community members challenged individuals involved in gambling, drug abuse or sexual harassment, they tried to focus on helping the individual understand the negative impact on themselves and the community, rather than on accusations.
- **Role of women and youth** Young people and women played a very important role in making the project effective. They had an impact through the youth group and *polli shomaj*, but also on the action committee. However, ensuring that the voices of women and young people were heard required constant effort from BRAC, particularly when facilitating work with the action committees. Holding separate meetings with women and youth at the start of the project was helpful in getting them involved, as was BRAC’s existing work with the *polli shomaj* groups. BRAC staff noted that gender sensitisation training with community members would be an effective addition to the project to promote the integration of gender perspectives into the community, both to tackle gender-based violence and to promote and strengthen the participation of women in decision-making including on community security issues.

- **Importance of BRAC support** Community members saw BRAC primarily as a facilitator and source of support, and regarded this as essential to getting the project going and making it sustainable. They felt that support from BRAC enabled them to feel confident in taking on serious problems, and that this would build their confidence for the future.
- **Value of training for raising awareness** Many of the successes of this project relied on successful awareness-raising by members of the community. Those who had been given training for this by BRAC all noted how useful it had been in helping them develop the necessary skills and understanding. They had also gone on to train some of their colleagues, but they asked that BRAC itself provide further training as well.
- **Value of participatory approaches, such as popular theatre** In addition to the more commonly used participatory methods of focus group discussions, the use of BRAC's popular theatre group of local people was extremely effective in addressing issues like gambling, drug use and sexual harassment. The performances are very popular, often attended by a substantial proportion of the village.
- **Co-operation with the police and authorities** Although maintaining links to the police and *UP* has been a challenge, when they are in place – for example with the former police superintendent or the current Chair of Rashidabad *UP* – community security efforts have been more effective. Police and political support ensures that serious crimes are punished and helps resolve other disputes. Often, the authorities do not actually need to take action – simply knowing that they support the project makes a huge difference to its impact.
- **Effective interventions do not have to be expensive** The community security approach requires extensive staff time from implementing organisations, but not a large amount of funding. In Kishoreganj, the activities the community undertook as part of the project were also minimal in cash costs. However, their potential impact is very large.

Wards 2, 3 and 5, Kamrangirchar slum, Dhaka

A new ICT centre is opened as part of the community security project, by the action committee and local stakeholders, ChangeMaker office, ward 5, Kamrangirchar, 2011.

CHANGEMAKER



Community background

Kamrangirchar is an island in the river Buriganga, separated by a narrow channel from the old centre of Dhaka. Covering an area of 10km², Kamrangirchar is home to around 1 million people according to the 2009 multiple indicator cluster survey conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF. As this suggests, the area is extremely densely populated, and forms Dhaka's most significant slum – well over 80 percent of the population are classed as slum dwellers.

Just 25 years ago, Kamrangirchar was home only to a small farming community growing food for sale in Dhaka's markets. The huge growth in population has been the result of the huge numbers of people leaving impoverished rural communities to seek work in Dhaka. As such there is a significant divide in Kamrangirchar between 'locals' whose families have been here for generations and who own most of the land and 'outsiders', more recent arrivals, usually poorer, who form around 80 percent of the population. However, a large proportion of these outsiders are transient – some will eventually move on to a different slum, or make money and move to a better neighbourhood, whilst new arrivals from the countryside fill their spaces.

Rickshaw pulling one of the main modes of transport in Dhaka is cycle-drawn rickshaw. The rickshaw 'puller' usually does not own the vehicle, but pays the owner a fixed fee for its use for a day or half day. Any profit they make over the fee is theirs to keep, but this can vary widely from day to day.

Most residents of Kamrangirchar work in Dhaka itself, although the area is also home to several small factories and workshops, which employ some of the population. Those working in Dhaka are usually employed in low-skilled jobs such as domestic service, construction or rickshaw pulling. Such work does not pay particularly well, and living costs are very high. A month's rent is around Tk 2,000 (£20) and food prices are extremely high, while a full time job in domestic service might bring in Tk 4,000 a month (£40). Because of this, most families need to have several wage earners, creating problems in caring for young children and keeping older children in education.

Kamrangirchar suffers all of the negative factors generally associated with slums. Basic services are lacking – clean water, sewerage, healthcare and good quality housing are all in extremely short supply. Educational opportunities are also limited – although the area does have several schools, only the one run by BRAC is free, which means that many families cannot afford to educate their children (or at least not all of their children all of the time). Investment in infrastructure and basic services in the area is limited, although in recent years groups of local residents have successfully lobbied for greater investment in the road network. Police coverage of the area is also minimal. One police station, with just nine beat-level officers covers 750,000 people.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kamrangirchar is known as a shelter for criminals and a centre for crime. A high proportion of the population are in some way involved in crime or illegal activity – for example many serious criminals now pay a more respectable family a small fee to look after firearms, thus minimising the chances of them being found in a police raid. Criminal syndicates and *mastaan* (musclemen) are powerful, and this contributes to

extremely violent, turbulent local politics. The chairman of the *UP* is currently in police custody, accused of three murders in relation to the sale of land acquired while his party was in government. However, the charges were brought shortly after the general election by activists of the newly elected government, so disentangling politics and crime in this case is almost impossible. What is clear is that politics in Kamrangirchar can be dangerous – the lack of willing witnesses against an individual who may be back in power in the future, for example, is testament to this.

Community security project

In 2008, ChangeMaker and Saferworld started a community security project in ward 5 of Kamrangirchar. This is one of nine wards (local government areas electing a member to the local council) that make up Kamrangirchar. ChangeMaker engaged in awareness-raising, and carried out key informant interviews and group discussions with women, men, youth, business people, land owners and service providers, to help the community identify their local safety concerns. Following this, a further ‘validation workshop’ prioritised the key issues, and the development of an action plan to address them began. A small action committee of community members (mostly high status individuals such as school teachers) was established to oversee the implementation of the action plan. This committee and the youth group provide the direction for future activities, while ChangeMaker acts as a facilitator. ChangeMaker also looks after the day-to-day management of the child safety centre set up as part of the project, although this is also overseen by the action committee.

In 2010, Saferworld and ChangeMaker extended the project to two neighbouring wards (2 and 3). A similar process of awareness-raising, group discussions and action planning was carried out in these wards. Because the three wards are adjacent, and have very similar safety concerns, it was decided to run the three areas’ community security projects as one larger piece. Thus, community meetings were held across all three wards, and the action committee was enlarged to include representatives from the new sites.

Priority issues and action plans

Through the interviews and group discussion facilitated by ChangeMaker, the communities in wards 5, 2 and 3 each identified safety and security problems facing their communities. These ranged from the lack of street lighting and the presence of criminal gangs to the high level of violence against women. In ward 5, the following issues were prioritised for action:

1. Safety of children while parents are at work
2. Lack of accessible community forum for solving problems
3. Lack of opportunities for youth in terms of education, skills training and employment

When the project was extended to wards 2 and 3, the same issues were prioritised, with one addition:

4. Poor relations with the police, and lack of understanding about how to access the formal justice system, for example by filing a case with the police.

With help from ChangeMaker, the communities devised action plans to tackle these challenges, of which the overarching aims were to:

1. Set up a community managed Child Safety Centre for children of working parents
2. Establish a community forum to enable people to discuss and resolve their safety concerns
3. Develop training, capacity building and employment opportunities for young people
4. Educate people about how to report crimes and file cases with the formal justice system, and improve communication with the police.

Some of the issues and actions prioritised in Kamrangirchar – the lack of opportunities for youth, for example – are not obviously about physical safety and ‘freedom from fear’. The people of Kamrangirchar perceive a very close connection between economic and social security and physical safety. The lack of opportunities for young people is seen to directly contribute to their recruitment into criminal gangs, and thus to the high level of crime and violence in the area. Conversely, the lack of a safe place for children during the day means that many parents work only part time or not at all, undermining their financial security in a context of extremely high living costs.

Ward 5 action plan

Site: ward 5, Kamrangirchar, Dhaka

Objective: Improve child safety

Action

- Set up a Child Safety Centre, providing day care and basic education for children of working parents

Aims

- Parents can freely pursue their employment and income generation activities
- Children are safe from accidents, abuse and trafficking
- Children will receive basic education and have improved nutrition, health care and good hygiene practices
- Children will have better entertainment opportunities and harmony with other children

Responsibilities

- ChangeMaker and action committee to find location for child safety centre, and hire local staff to care for children
- ChangeMaker to perform day-to-day management
- Action committee to oversee running of the Centre and make strategic decisions

Funding

- Some funding to be provided from Saferworld grant, to be supplemented by Tk 10 per day fee for use of centre and local fundraising

Steps taken

An action committee of community members was formed to oversee the implementation of the action plan. The committee initially included four men and one woman, but has now been expanded to include additional members from wards 2 and 3 and now consists of six men and two women. Committee members are mostly high-status individuals, including social elites, a school teacher and members of the *ponchayet* (local dispute resolution council). The committee worked alongside ChangeMaker to put the action plans into practice. The committee also works with a youth group that was formed as part of the project. The action committee meets at least once a month and oversees the project, although much of the day-to-day management (especially of the Child Safety Centre) is handled by ChangeMaker.

Child Safety Centre

In consultation with the community, ChangeMaker rented a building in Kamrangirchar and set up a day care centre for children of working parents. Prior to this, many working parents had to leave their children at home alone during the day where they were vulnerable to

various dangers on the streets of Kamrangirchar, from accidents to abduction and abuse. The Centre keeps them safe, but also provides basic education (covering literacy, numeracy and basic social education), regular meals based on advice provided by a nutritional expert, and regular visits from a doctor, who provides his services on a voluntary basis. The Centre caters for children aged between one and five years old, and originally had space for around 20 children. Since the expansion of the project to wards 2 and 3, the Centre has moved to a new building, which is more conveniently located at the junction of the three wards and has a larger capacity to accommodate around 45–50 children.

Parents pay a small fee of Tk 10 per day for use of the Centre. This arrangement was agreed by ChangeMaker and the parents in order to help make the Centre sustainable after the end of the initial project period ended. ChangeMaker carries out day-to-day management, with a small staff of local people to care for the children – paid by ChangeMaker from their own resources and locally-raised funds. Strategic direction and key decisions, such as the level of fees, are the responsibility of the action committee, who visit the centre regularly to monitor the care provided to children.

Community forum for resolving safety problems

This aspect of the action plan has proved rather hard to put into practice, perhaps because its objectives and mechanism were not precisely pinned down at the outset. The action committee has taken on some of the tasks envisaged for this aspect of the project, helping to tackle a variety of local challenges beyond the immediate remit of the community security action plan. More recently, however, steps have been taken to set up a more accessible community forum to discuss and resolve social and safety issues. In December 2010, ChangeMaker and the action committee organised an open community meeting to discuss local problems. This was well attended, and several problems and actions were identified, for example around tackling the health problems caused by the build up of refuse in the streets. The intention is that such meetings will become a regular occurrence.

Training and employment opportunities for young people

A variety of initiatives were set up to provide opportunities for the young people of Kamrangirchar, mostly organised through an informal youth group set up alongside the community security project. Firstly, ChangeMaker received donations in kind from local businesses in order to set up a small education and employment advice centre, where young people were given access to training in basic information, communication and technology (ICT) skills, much in demand in the Bangladeshi labour market. Through this centre, information was also provided about locating and applying for job opportunities – a major barrier to employment for many people in the area is that they do not know how to access job opportunities other than unskilled labour. To assist with this, a series of events with representatives of local businesses was set up, so that young people could hear about what skills and qualities will best equip them to secure employment.

As well as addressing youth educational and employment needs, the youth group was also engaged in supporting other aspects of the community security project, thus increasing social awareness of young people and diverting them from involvement in criminal or anti-social activities. For example, the youth group is helping to educate others in the community on some of the aspects of dealing with the police and the formal justice system – such as completing the forms needed to file a case with the local police – which are often a significant barrier in accessing justice for local people.

Improving links with the police

Prior to the project, high levels of mistrust hindered links being formed between the community and the police. The action committee and ChangeMaker worked with the local *thana* to organise a public meeting with the community. Kamrangirchar is a ‘model *thana*’ – a focus site for the national Police Reform Programme. As such, it has held a series of *thana* ‘open days’, but in the past these have often been poorly attended, partly because they are in the police station itself. Although getting local people to visit the police station is part of the purpose of the ‘open days’, several factors act as a deterrent for some local people to have their voices heard in these meetings. The structured nature of the open day meetings leaves very little time and scope for marginalised groups of the community, including women and the poor, to speak publicly about their concerns compared to the local elite or socio-economically and politically influential people. Other factors, such as fear of the consequences of speaking publicly against the police within the police station, not enough or no experience of interaction with the police in the past and preconceived ideas about *thanas* not being people-friendly, led to a low level of participation by all sections of the community. Realising that the location was to some extent acting as a deterrent, the action committee worked with the police to organise a community meeting on the sidelines of the open days in a neutral venue to allow everyone, specially marginalised groups, to attend these less structured meetings without fear or mistrust. The action committee mobilised women and other marginalised people to attend these meetings to raise their concerns. These meetings attracted a large number of people and gave them the opportunity to raise their concerns with the police, and to hear about crime prevention and the work of the *thana*. Following this, a similar approach to future ‘open days’ is planned. The communities of wards 2, 3 and 5 have also been engaging directly with their respective ‘beat level’ police officers – the officers assigned to patrol their particular neighbourhoods. The long term objective of these well-attended community meetings – where local people from all social background, the police, members of RAB and private companies/sector participated – is to build confidence among the community people so that their participation on *thana* open days increases and their communication and understanding with the police improves.

Secondly, the youth group and other community members began a crime-monitoring project in January 2011, through which they speak to victims and record details of local crimes, many of which are not reported to the police. A summary of this information,

detailing the types of crime that are most prevalent and where and when they tend to occur, is shared with the police to improve communication and help them target their crime prevention efforts. This approach also helps the community take ownership of their own problems by working alongside the police to identify and tackle crime. Alongside this activity, information and education is provided to local people about how to report crime to the police, and the procedures they need to follow to be able to access the formal justice system – something that local residents often do not know how to do.

Results achieved

Child Safety Centre

- The Child Safety Centre is providing day care for 30–40 children, six days a week. This has enabled their parents to go back to work, or to work full time, making a major difference to their income. Most of the mothers of children at the centre work in domestic service in Dhaka, and for many of them the Child Safety Centre has enabled them to double their individual income to around Tk 4,000 per month by working full time. For some families, this means that both parents are now able to work full time.
- The parents of children at the Child Safety Centre say that attending the centre has radically improved their health, hygiene practices, nutrition and education. They are provided with a basic nutritious diet, a safe environment, basic education and social skills – around 80 per cent of mothers say that their children’s general behaviour has improved since attending the centre.
- Child safety has improved, not just for the children at the Centre, but also for others because the project has increased popular awareness of the dangers faced by small children in the area. Child abduction is seen as a particular threat in Kamrangirchar, but there are also other dangers including drowning in the many small pools in the area, or being caught in frequent house fires.

Improved community ability to tackle security problems

- Following the community meeting to identify local problems that took place in late 2010, community members – led by the action committee – took action to tackle the level of refuse in the streets. They approached a rubbish collection company working in neighbouring areas of Dhaka, who agreed to extend their services to Kamrangirchar for a small fee of Tk 30 per month paid by each household. Rubbish in the streets, and its associated health problems, have decreased sharply.

Improved community-police relations and crime prevention

- The officer in charge (OIC) of the local *thana* felt that raising awareness through recent community meetings had helped to reduce crime. For instance, soon after a recent burglary

“People who were voiceless now have a voice.”

Member of youth group working on access to justice

at a local mosque all of the stolen goods were anonymously returned. Community members ascribed this to increased crime awareness in the community.

- Although it is very difficult to attribute changes in the overall level of crime and insecurity to the project activities, several community members did feel that some of the problems associated with youth unemployment and disillusionment – for example drug offences – had decreased recently.
- The crime-monitoring project – although it has only been running since January 2011 – has already identified some local trends, particularly a high level of drug-related crime and abuse of women and children, much of which is not usually reported to the police.
- The police also stated that the information from the crime-monitoring project was very useful, as it helps them to understand the challenges at the grassroots level. The *thana* is keen to see further information sharing at the beat level.
- Community knowledge of how to report crimes and access the formal justice system has been improved, and in February 2011 the youth group directly helped at least 10 people to file a case with the local police, by showing them how to fill in the appropriate forms and guiding them through the process.

“I used to hear people every week going through the streets with a loudhailer searching for information about a lost child. Now a whole month can pass without hearing this.”

Member of Kamrangirchar action committee

Khas land land owned by the government, often used for administrative buildings and public services. It can also be granted rent-free to community organisations and NGOs that are providing a public service, although the administrative process to enable this can be lengthy.

Improved education and employment for young people

- The young people receiving skills training and support to find employment have found it extremely helpful. They say that the skills they are learning will help them find the jobs they aspire to. Although this aspect of the project was only started in late 2010, at the time of writing around five young people have already found work.

Increasing community ownership and leadership

- Community ownership of the project is gradually increasing. The action committee is expanding its role, taking over more of the management of the Child Safety Centre and attempting to raise funds from local businesses to make it sustainable. They are keen to expand this project to the rest of Kamrangirchar.
- The action committee is working with the *UP* to obtain government ‘*khas land*’ for the Child Safety Centre. This can be made available for public services and would be rent-free. As rent is the most significant running cost for the Centre, this would be a big step towards making it financially sustainable.
- Community trust and willingness to discuss safety issues has increased significantly. When ChangeMaker started this project, unease over discussing potentially sensitive issues such as security meant that they had to take a very broad approach, avoiding explicit references to crime or violence in the project. Now, people are proactively asking to discuss these sensitive issues, and openly discussing the threat from criminal syndicates at public meetings.

Challenges

- **Building sustainability** There are two key aspects to making this project sustainable. The first aspect is building community engagement, motivation and capacity to enable them to continue identifying and resolving problems, working with the police, and so on with reduced external support. Even more challenging, though is making the Child Safety Centre financially sustainable, as its costs are fairly high. Increasing the fees is not an option given levels of poverty, and there have been gaps in donor funding. The Tk 10 daily fee for each child for use of the Centre is already a barrier to poorer families. Five years ago, another NGO set up a similar childcare centre, but it folded after donor funding ceased. This underlines the need for real ownership by the local community in order to make this kind of intervention sustainable without extensive financial support from outside.
- **Time** Building trust, community ownership and local capacity takes a considerable amount of time. However, these are clearly necessary if the project is to be sustainable without constant external funding and support. Certain activities, such as the community problem-solving forum, have taken a long time to get going, because of a lack of motivation, political barriers and other demands on people's time.
- **Tackling underlying problems** As in Kishoreganj, this project is a small step towards tackling some major threats to human security. In Kamrangirchar, these include extreme poverty, high crime rates, and the dominance of criminal groups in the area. Ultimately, it will take considerable time for interventions like skills training for young people to have an impact. This underlines the need to make the project sustainable over the longer term.
- **Managing expectations** ChangeMaker found it challenging to get buy-in to the project without raising unrealistic expectations of free services and hand-outs. This is made harder by the fact that many other NGOs working in the area provide a *per diem* payment to everyone who attends their meetings. ChangeMaker have refused to do this, and attempted to foster community ownership rather than dependence.
- **Suspicion** Initially, many local people were suspicious of ChangeMaker's motives, especially as they were new to the area. At the start of the project, ChangeMaker could not openly discuss security or crime, as the sensitivity and suspicion around these issues was too high – many local people thought they might be a front for a police crackdown in the area. Gradually, close engagement with the community has eroded this initial suspicion, to the point that local people now proactively ask to discuss crime and violence at public meetings.

- **Political turbulence** Local politics in Kamrangirchar are turbulent and often violent, creating some serious challenges for the project. For example, the *UP* chairman was very supportive, and was helping to negotiate rent-free *khas land* to be allocated for the Child Safety Centre. But he was arrested on charges of politically-motivated murder brought by activists of the opposing political party, and is now in jail. There was another example of one of the action committee members (a political activist for an opposition party) being accused by others of using the Child Safety Centre as a front for child trafficking. ChangeMaker has mitigated the challenge of political turbulence by working with the action committee and community to identify and diplomatically approach the key actors.
- **Relations with the police** In the past, the relationship between the community and local police has been tense, and improving this has required careful management. Initially, the police opposed the crime monitoring work, as their internal performance management incentivises low crime figures. However, their support was gained by presenting it to them as a way to effectively target their crime prevention efforts.
- **Anticipated opposition from powerful groups** So far, there has been no direct opposition from powerful criminal groups. However, everyone involved in the project anticipates encountering such opposition at some stage, and this fear has slowed progress, and caused some families to discourage relatives from taking part in the project. ChangeMaker have been aware of this risk from the beginning of the project, and have carefully monitored the situation. The organisation's strategy has been to gradually build the credibility of the project with local authorities and key stakeholders, making it harder to publicly challenge. This has required a good understanding of the context, and underlines the utility of carrying out an analysis of the context and political economy at the start of this kind of project.

Lessons learnt

“We have to make people aware of the problems. Ultimately, social awareness is more powerful than guns.”

Kamrangirchar resident

- **Community ownership** Ultimately, the success of this project relies on ownership being taken by the community. The action committee members, youth group and local police all felt that long-term impact relied on building awareness and understanding of the problems in the community, and developing locally-owned mechanisms to solve them. The recent initiatives taken to arrange rubbish collections are an encouraging sign in this direction, as this did not form part of the original action plan, but emerged from a community meeting. Eventually, the community will also need to be able to manage the Child Safety Centre.
- **Local sources of funding** There have been some gaps in donor funding over recent years, but the Child Safety Centre has stayed open. This is largely because local sources of funding were found, which would not have been possible without local ownership of the project. Firstly, parents pay Tk 10 per day for each child for the use of the Centre – this is controversial, but the parents see it as cheap for something that allows them to double their income. This fee covers around half the running costs of the centre. The action committee secured around

Zakat A Muslim religious tax or charitable donation, the giving of which is a religious obligation but not a legal one in Bangladesh. It is usually 2.5 percent of income.

Tk 10,000 through *zakat* religious charitable donations, and around Tk 15,000 in cash from local businesses, as well as in-kind donations such as food and medicine for the Centre.

- **Staying engaged over the long term** This project has successfully built local ownership and made an impact on tough issues like improving child safety and strengthening the community's relations with the police. However, this has only been made possible through the sustained engagement of ChangeMaker, especially because the population of the area is fairly transient. The general view was that three to five years of engagement were needed to ensure that the community had the capacity to maintain the project independently.
- **Connecting safety to livelihoods** Many of the livelihood and security issues faced by Kamrangirchar residents are closely linked – for example, the risks to young children mean that parents cannot work full time. Making this link an explicit part of the project was beneficial both because local people saw this as a sensible way to address their problems, and because it helped minimise the sensitivities around a 'security' project.
- **Benefits of a visible, major intervention** The Child Safety Centre has been an ongoing, highly visible intervention, which has built the credibility of both ChangeMaker and the community security project. This has been the springboard for wider engagement in the meetings with police, and for the public meetings to discuss other safety issues.
- **Youth as change agents** The young people of Kamrangirchar – provided with guidance and capacity building – have taken a leadership role in addressing community security issues. They are leading the crime-monitoring project, and provide support to other activities such as the Child Safety Centre.
- **Links to the private sector** Building links to the local private sector has not only improved the financial sustainability of the project, but has also provided the opportunity for young people to hear directly from employers what they are looking for in a job applicant. Private sector partners feel that the project also benefits them, by reducing the crime and insecurity that threaten their businesses.
- **Links to complementary initiatives** The problems facing Kamrangirchar are huge, and this project can only have a small impact. However, by building links to other NGO, state and private sector initiatives on related issues, this impact can be increased. For example, co-operation with the 'Kamrangirchar social development organisation', which provides a library, sports and a computer centre, has increased the impact of the youth programme.

One of the three community meetings organised in Bhatgaon with participation of community members and local stakeholders of the project, Bhatgaon village, Kishoreganj district, January/February 2011.

BRAC



3

Conclusions

Over the last four years, Saferworld and its local partners have developed a rich body of experience from community security projects in Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar. The two sites are different in many ways – demographically, economically and in terms of the community security challenges they face. Nevertheless, many of the key challenges and lessons learnt in the two sites are complementary, speaking to issues that are of potential relevance to all community security interventions. This concluding section draws together some of the most significant learning from the two case studies, in particular where the two have generated similar or complementary experience. This learning could inform similar approaches in other places, and by other organisations, as well as informing efforts to increase the impact and scale of Saferworld’s and partners’ community security work in Bangladesh.

In both Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar, one of the most significant challenges identified was that of building sustainability. If a community security project is genuinely successful, it should be creating the informal institutions, confidence and motivation for the community to continue identifying and resolving their own safety and security problems after the formal ‘project’ comes to an end. However, in both sites, achieving this has been difficult. In Hajirgol, for example, there was a sense that the effectiveness of community efforts to tackle gambling and drug use has declined over time, whilst in Kamrangirchar the Child Safety Centre has faced an ongoing challenge in terms of financial sustainability.

Nevertheless, in both sites there has been some notable success in developing sustainability – in Hajirgol for example, despite declining impact, it is significant that the community security project has continued since 2008 with minimal direct external support over the last two years. The clear lesson from both sites is that sustainability must rest on community ownership and leadership of the community security process. Community members and implementing staff alike are clear that the emphasis on community members themselves identifying problems and designing responses has led to effective interventions, and has

helped community members develop capacity and confidence. In Kamrangirchar, for example, members of the action committee have worked with the community to identify and address additional problems, beyond those in the original action plan. Community ownership has supported financial sustainability too, with local fundraising paying part of the costs of the Kamrangirchar Child Safety Centre. In Kishoreganj, engagement from the local community has enabled some activities – such as the construction of bathing shelters along the river – to be carried out without financial cost, using in-kind donations of labour and materials.

Building genuine community ownership is not necessarily easy, however. Indeed, it links directly to another challenge identified in both case studies – the need for a considerable investment of time by the implementing agency. A clear lesson from experience in both Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar is that building community awareness, ownership and capacity to the point that they are able to continue the project without external support would require several years of close engagement from the implementing agency. In Kamrangirchar in particular, a considerable investment of time was required to overcome local people's initial suspicions about the project, especially as the implementing agency was new to the area.

Developing 'community' ownership obviously also raises questions about who is included in the community, and whose voices are heard. In Kishoreganj in particular, there was some disagreement about the extent to which people who were seen as 'perpetrators' – those involved in gambling, drug use and sexual harassment – should be allowed a voice in the community security process. Several community members opposed their inclusion in community meetings, but others felt that excluding these individuals ran the risk of polarising opinion, and thus undermining the effectiveness of the project. The latter view prevailed, and experience showed that focusing on helping individuals understand the negative outcomes of their actions was more effective than an accusatory, exclusive approach.

Women and young people are also frequently excluded from decision making and voice in Bangladeshi communities, and another lesson from both case studies is the importance of proactive steps to ensure their inclusion in community security work. Inclusivity and diversity are ongoing challenges – the aim of 50 percent female representation on action committees and other groups was rarely met. However, stakeholders, including donors, need to be mindful of the need to set realistic indicators of success. For example, it will not necessarily be possible to achieve 50 percent female representation at the outset of the initiative. Rather this has to be built up incrementally over the duration of the project and beyond, taking into account the realities of the context.

In both Kamrangirchar and Kishoreganj, the projects were strengthened by the leadership role of women and young people, and several lessons were learnt about supporting this. Organising separate focus groups, setting up youth groups and using existing associations like the *polli shomaj* for women and the popular theatre group for young people, have all

been effective ways of ensuring a strong role for women and young people. All of these proactive options, however, need to be undertaken carefully, to avoid the risk of a backlash from more dominant groups who could potentially feel threatened by the empowerment of women and young people.

The need for sensitivity to context and local power dynamics is critical. In both case studies, local elites, politics and power dynamics had to be carefully handled. In Hajirgol, for example, community members encountered opposition to their activities from some locally powerful individuals who were personally benefitted from gambling and drug use. In Kamrangirchar, sensitivities around the term 'security' and political turbulence in the *Union Parishad* created delays for the project. As well as a complex relationship with local elites, both project sites had to contend with an often tense relationship between local communities and the police, which had the potential to undermine the effectiveness of community security efforts.

There is the need for a good understanding of the context, and willingness to adapt as necessary. In Kamrangirchar, for example, the implementing agency initially avoided the term 'security', using other less sensitive terminology to gain acceptance for the project. In both sites, direct engagement with local authorities has also helped strengthen the project, as has working with existing local elites to ensure that they support the community security project – or at least do not oppose it. Work with existing power structures, however, was always balanced by the focus on ownership by the whole community and efforts to promote the inclusion of subordinate groups including women and young people.

Building formal links with the police and government authorities at local and national level is crucial for the success of the community security approach. Strong community partnerships with the police and government authorities will enable all parties to tackle insecurity and resolve disputes more effectively. In both Kamrangirchar and Kishoreganj, the police and government authorities have been directly included in the project, helping to build trust with the community members. This has enabled community security problems to be identified and addressed jointly by communities and authorities, both of which have an important role to play. In addition, this has contributed to stronger state-citizen relations, with increased accountability of the authorities to the individuals whose safety, security and rights they are supposed to protect and ensure.

Finally, in both case studies, local people and implementing agencies highlighted the important link between community security efforts and underlying socio-economic and political drivers of insecurity. Although the community security approach will not provide solutions that completely eradicate the underlying sources of community security problems, such as unemployment and extreme poverty, it can help address these problems to some extent in a way that brings direct benefits to the affected communities. In both geographic locations, it was found that links could be made to efforts to address these underlying challenges. In Kamrangirchar, for example, while it was beyond the scope of the project to address the root

causes of insecurity in the area, the Child Safety Centre was explicitly intended to protect the physical security of children and improve the livelihoods of their families by enabling both parents to go to work and earn a living. This dual objective helped local people understand the long-term value of the project.

The overall message from the community security approach in Bangladesh is clear – where communities are motivated and enabled to organise themselves, they can identify and solve the problems that create insecurity. This can complement and feed into national, state-led safety and security initiatives. Governments, donors and communities in other countries would do well to harness this potential.

Annex 1: Methodology

The research for this report was based on methodological triangulation, gathering data through documents, interviews and focus group discussions:

1. A desk review of the project documents, including Terms of Reference, reports from implementing organisations, and previous assessments and evaluations
2. A number of semi-structured interviews and conversations with:
 - BRAC, ChangeMaker and Saferworld staff in Kishoreganj, Kamrangirchar and Dhaka
 - Key individuals in Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar sites including former *UP* members, and *Upazila Nirbahi* (sub-district administrative head) and police officers
3. A series of focus group discussions using basic guide questionnaires with:
 - Rashidabad youth group, attending training course with BRAC (nine male, eight female)
 - Rashidabad and Bhatgaon male members of youth group and action committees (approximately 25 people)
 - Rashidabad and Bhatgaon female members of youth group, *polli shomaj* and action committees (approximately 35 people)
 - Hajirgol action committee and elites (nine male, three female)
 - Hajirgol female members of youth group (15 people)
 - Hajirgol male members of youth group (six people)
 - Hajirgol *polli shomaj* (eight female)
 - BRAC staff (four male)
 - Kamrangirchar action committee (three male, one female)
 - Kamrangirchar key community stakeholders (three male)
 - Kamrangirchar youth group (three male, two female)
 - Kamrangirchar mothers of children attending the community centre (five women)
 - ChangeMaker staff, Kamrangirchar (two female, three male)

In addition to these interviews and focus group discussions, visits were also made to the Child Safety Centre, the Hajirgol and Bhatgaon community centres, and to a popular theatre performance in Bhatgaon.

This research faced some constraints that imposed limitations on its findings. The most significant was the tight time schedule, and the limited availability of key people for interviews and focus groups – especially in Kamrangirchar. This meant that some planned meetings were not able to go ahead, and that some focus groups were smaller than would have been ideal. The accurate assessment of project impact and results was also limited by the lack of consistent baseline information about the situation before the project began. This meant project achievements in terms of improved security, for instance – such as a decrease in the incidents of sexual harassment – were hard to quantitatively measure. ‘Then and now’ participatory tools were used to mitigate this problem.

Acronyms and Bangla terms

AL Awami League

BNP Bangladesh Nationalist Party

BRAC previously the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, BRAC is now the full name of the organisation

Dophador village based local police head

Eve teasing Euphemism for sexual harassment and abuse of girls and women in public places, also known as *jouno hoirani* in Bangla.

Hartal political strike calling for complete shutdown of economic activities and stoppage of transport

ICT information, communication and technology

Khas land land owned by the government, which can be made available rent free for public services

Mastaan literally 'muscleman'; refers to strongmen and criminal bosses

NGO non-governmental organisation

OIC officer in charge of a *thana*

Phensidyl a cough medicine high in codeine and other opiates, produced in India but illegal in Bangladesh

Polli shomaj village-level women's federations of the poor, organised by BRAC

Ponchayet traditional community-level dispute resolution mechanism

PRP Police Reform Programme, a national reform agenda implemented by the Bangladesh Police

Shalish traditional community-level dispute resolution mechanism

Taka (Tk) currency of Bangladesh (£1 = approximately Tk 120)

Thana police station

Union Parishad (UP) local government authority, consisting of several wards, with an elected member for each ward

Upazila a sub-district; the next level of local government, consisting of several *Union Parishads*.

Upazila Nirbahi the administrative officer responsible for an *Upazila*

Zakat Muslim religious tax or charitable donation, the giving of which is a religious obligation but not a legal one in Bangladesh (usually 2.5 percent of income)

Profiles of implementing organisations



BRAC

BRAC is a non-governmental development organisation, which has been an initiator and catalyst for many innovations and changes in Bangladesh since the country's independence. Focusing on long-term community development, BRAC currently operates in all districts in Bangladesh as well as a number of other poor, developing countries. BRAC has five core programmes, which are Microfinance, Health, Education, Social Development, and Human Rights and Legal Services. "Translating Awareness into Action" is the motto of Social Development Programme at BRAC. The programme is designed to empower the poor so that they are aware of their rights, can claim their entitlement and resist exploitation.

For further information visit www.brac.net



ChangeMaker

ChangeMaker: Society for Social and Economic Development is a Bangladeshi non-governmental organisation, encouraging engagement of civil society organisations, private sector enterprises, government agencies, and educational and research institutes in human, social and economic development. ChangeMaker's objective is to address the urgent and critical issues of the community in an integrated way and provide an enabling environment to encourage participation of the target community to take the programmes forward on their own.

For further information visit www.ChangeMaker-bd.org



Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent non-governmental organisation that works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We work with governments, international organisation and civil society to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others. Saferworld has programmes in Africa, Asia and Europe.

For further information visit www.saferworld.org.uk

We all have the right to safe and secure lives, but creating the conditions in which everyone can enjoy this right is not easy. Effectively addressing issues of safety and security requires a partnership approach between those affected by insecurity and those responsible for promoting and maintaining the safety and welfare of the public. Saferworld and partners BRAC and ChangeMaker have developed an approach to community security in Bangladesh working in Kishoreganj and Kamrangirchar. This publication outlines the community security approach in Bangladesh with case studies of the different project sites.

COVER PHOTO: Villagers' meeting at the site donated by a local resident for the construction of a community security centre, Bhatgaon village, Kishoreganj, March 2011. © ADAM DRURY.



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Registered charity no. 1043843

A company limited by guarantee no. 3015948