

Road policing in Asia: Considerations for strengthening policy and practice to improve road safety

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ABSTRACT

One aspect of the Global Road Safety Partnership's (GRSP) collaborative work in Asia is the provision of technical road policing support to enhance traffic law enforcement across a range of agencies in Ho Chi Minh City, Bandung, Shanghai, Bangkok, Mumbai and across the Philippines. Improved ability of enforcement agencies to deter illegal/risky road use through effective enforcement practices that align with international good practice is a critical component of this work. International experience shows that data-led, appropriately resourced road policing makes a unique contribution to reducing road trauma. This paper describes the GRSP's road policing capacity building activities in Asia, highlighting some of the key challenges experienced across the region and outlining potential solutions to improve traffic law enforcement.

Key words: Traffic law enforcement, road policing, speed management, capacity building, drink driving

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1. Introduction

In 1998, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) recognised road trauma as a man-made humanitarian crisis in its World Disasters Report. From this recognition, the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) was established, with a particular focus on low- and middle-income countries¹. It is in these countries where the largest road trauma burden exists. The most recent Global Status Report on Road Safety (World Health Organization, 2018) highlights that the burden of road traffic injuries is disproportionately high in low- and middle-income countries in relation to their populations as well as to the number of motor vehicles in circulation. Regional variation in road traffic injuries also exists. For example, the Global Status Report on Road Safety documents that when compared to the global rate of road traffic deaths (18.2/100,000 population), South East Asia is one of the regions recording a higher burden (20.7/100,000 population). These figures underpin the need for urgent efforts and collaboration to help improve road safety.

One aspect of the GRSP's collaborative work in the Asian region is provision of technical road policing support to enhance traffic law enforcement across a range of agencies in five cities: Ho Chi Minh City, Bandung, Shanghai, Bangkok, Mumbai, and at the national level in the Philippines. Improving the ability of enforcement agencies to deter illegal/risky road use through effective enforcement practices that align with international good practice is a critical component of this work. Appropriate enforcement of comprehensive, evidence-based laws is one of the key countermeasures shown to reduce road crashes and related deaths and injuries (Richard et al, 2018; World Health Organization, 2017). These efforts to improve road traffic law enforcement in the region align with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, this work seeks to enhance the ability to reach targets associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically, targets 3.6 and 11.2.

¹ The GRSP is an IFRC hosted programme with the aim of reducing road trauma by facilitating partnership and collaboration with government, private sector, and civil society stakeholders.

Improving the capability of enforcement agencies to effectively enforce road traffic laws should, in turn, lead to reductions in road fatalities (*Target 3.6: By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents*). In South East Asia, 43 percent of all road traffic deaths are represented by users of motorized 2 and 3 wheelers (World Health Organization, 2018). Vulnerable road users are over-represented in road trauma in Asia, compared to some other regions. Therefore, this work is also relevant to improving the safety of those who are least protected in an increasingly motorising region (*Target 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons*).

2. Building Road Policing Capacity in Asia

As part of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Initiative for Global Road Safety (BIGRS 2015-2019), the GRSP is funded to provide technical support to police enforcement agencies in Bandung, Indonesia; Bangkok, Thailand; Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; Mumbai, India; and Shanghai, China. It is important to note that a comprehensive approach to improving road safety is central to the BIGRS city-based initiatives, with police enforcement just one component (along with a focus on infrastructure and safer mobility, mass media campaigns to promote behaviour change, and roadside observational studies to track prevalence of key behavioural risk factors).

Road policing technical support has been characterised by ongoing, face-to-face meetings with senior level officers and operational police, as well as the provision of detailed technical training, coaching and mentoring on a wide range of topics by the GRSP road policing capacity building team. In collaboration with enforcement agencies in each city, and consistent with the behavioural risk factors emphasised by the BIGRS initiative, road policing capacity building training has focused on: leadership training for senior level officers; road safety enforcement practices including safe vehicle intercept techniques; the establishment and operation of roadside checkpoints (to enhance officer safety and promote efficient intercept tactics) and principles and techniques for enforcing drink driving, speeding, and the non-use/incorrect use of helmets, seatbelts and child restraints; effective police communications for enhancing enforcement operations, procedural justice practices; data-led enforcement; and strategic and operational planning and management. Together, this suite of topics represents a comprehensive programme of capacity building that has assisted in raising awareness among police agencies of the importance of and need to enforce existing laws, the need to improve laws that are deficient, and how best to approach challenging and diverse enforcement environments with limited human and other policing resources.

In addition to the work described above, the GRSP is also working with local partners in the Philippines to strengthen the capacity of police to enhance their speed enforcement capability. In recent years, the national government has acted to strengthen road safety laws, including a focus on reducing speeding. For instance, in 2018, a Joint Memorandum Circular was issued by various Departments to promote the ability of Local Government Units (LGUs) to set speed limits on all roads and to establish co-ordination mechanisms between the national government and LGUs. Through its Road Safety Grants Programme, the GRSP has provided funding to various sectors to advocate for strengthened road safety legislation and its implementation. The recently established United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund (UNRSF) recognised the need to appropriately implement the 2019 Joint Memorandum Circular in a sustainable manner and identified this work as worthy of receiving funding as one of its first pilot projects to proceed in 2019/2020. The GRSP and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), together with local partners in the Philippines, are implementing this work. The project is supporting the implementation of the Joint Memorandum Circular in LGUs to specifically strengthen speed enforcement through the establishment of a core group of enforcement personnel from different enforcement agencies who will receive training from the GRSP road policing capacity building team. This core group of trained enforcement personnel will then provide speed enforcement training at the Local Transportation Office (LTO) district level to promote sustainability of a systematic approach to training and dissemination on speed limit setting and speed enforcement strategies. This programme of work represents a significant step forward in promoting a nationally supported approach to regional and local level speed enforcement in the Philippines.

3. Capacity building challenges

Enhancing the capacity of traffic police to enforce traffic law is a complex undertaking. In the first instance, it is necessary to gain a full appreciation of current legislation in order to determine what aspects of road user behaviour can actually be enforced by police. There is variation in what is possible across jurisdictions. In some instances, helmet wearing is enforceable by police, yet there is no legal requirement for the helmet to be properly fastened. This legislative loophole essentially renders a helmet an ineffective piece of safety equipment because it needs to be properly fitted and fastened to provide appropriate protection to the wearer. Seatbelt use by all vehicle passengers is another safety equipment-related issue that requires attention in some countries. For instance, in many countries, seatbelt use was initially mandated only for front seat passengers, leaving back seat passengers unprotected by law and unprotected from the physical forces that occur when a vehicle comes to a halt, resulting in the human body being thrown around (or out of) the vehicle. Rear seatbelt use has eventually been mandated in many jurisdictions, however this delay in recognising the need for all passengers to be appropriately secured has led to the motoring public and some police agencies/officers not placing due importance on the need to ensure all occupants are appropriately restrained.

Another challenge relates to the legal recognition of alcohol as a significant contributor to impaired road use. In jurisdictions where alcohol consumption is not legal (e.g., Indonesia), alcohol-related road use is generally not monitored or enforced. Enforcement agencies may be reluctant to strengthen drink driving enforcement practices because alcohol is banned, and therefore, this behavioural risk factor may not be deemed a high priority for traffic police enforcement activities. It is important to note that a legal ban on alcohol does not necessarily equate to the absence of alcohol as a contributing factor to road trauma in a country. Rather, it highlights one of the challenges faced by authorities when wishing to tackle the road trauma problem. In such circumstances, it is important to understand the prevalence of alcohol impairment and its contribution to road crashes. Requiring blood alcohol concentration testing of all fatally injured drivers and vulnerable road users would assist in this regard.

Having a thorough understanding of existing legislative parameters in any jurisdiction provides an opportunity to engage with police and policy makers to advocate for legal deficiencies to be rectified. Of equal importance is the need to engage with senior management of all police agencies to establish that, for example, they understood the goals of the BIGRS initiative, the expectations that their involvement in the initiative placed on their personnel, and their willingness to engage with the GRSP road policing team to allow capacity building activities to be undertaken. Without securing agreement of senior police management for participation in such an initiative, as well as certainty of their understanding of why enforcement of the key behavioural risk factors is necessary, capacity building activities are unlikely to translate into enhanced enforcement practices over time.

Similarly, assessments of enforcement-related equipment were necessary in order to determine enforcement readiness, particularly in regard to checkpoint safety knowledge and equipment, as well as speed and alcohol detection equipment. In some cases, police were ill-equipped to establish safe roadside checkpoints due to a lack of personal protective equipment as well as a lack of practical experience in establishing, conducting and monitoring safe checkpoints. Some other international jurisdictions have also found similar outcomes, for example, the United States of America (Kanable, 2005; Johnson, 2004). Ensuring officer safety must always be the paramount consideration for any roadside enforcement operation. Therefore, reflective vests and other high visibility and checkpoint-related items were procured for some cities to support this need.

Traffic congestion in densely populated, large Asian cities is another key enforcement challenge. There appears to be a constant tension between the need for police agencies to keep traffic flowing and the need to ensure traffic laws are enforced. Establishing roadside checkpoints to conduct regular enforcement activities (e.g., checking for appropriate seatbelt use or conducting breath testing to detect alcohol impairment) can be at odds with internal organisational policies for ensuring traffic congestion is minimised.

A key aspect of the work identified above is the need for senior police leadership to fully appreciate the importance of deterrence-based road policing activities in reducing road crashes. In addition, there is great scope for policing agencies to better understand how data can be used to improve and refine their

operations. In many cases, police agencies do not collect data, collect but do not analyse it, or don't readily share data with partner agencies. Enforcement-related data should be collected and analysed to better inform future enforcement activities. For example, data collected by police while enforcing the law can provide a greater understanding of things such as high alcohol-related crash times, high trauma hours/days across a week, and the sections of the road network that experience high speeds. These types of data can provide essential information to police managers about how and where to deploy enforcement operations to reduce drink driving and speeding, for example.

All the cities mentioned above experience limitations in traffic policing resources, coupled with competing enforcement demands. Limited resourcing is always accompanied by the challenge of effective resource utilisation for effective enforcement outputs. Planning is an important element of good management and decision making, especially when resources are restricted (Global Road Safety Partnership, 2007). Sometimes, operational planning (weekly, monthly, yearly) doesn't exist or is not utilised by police agencies. The GRSP has provided training that aims to instill understanding of the need for a strategic enforcement plan (including objectives and goals), as well as the allocation of resources to meet these objectives, which can include preparing and developing procedures/techniques to complete each task/function of the police agency. With the emphasis on data led enforcement, it becomes more crucial for road police to use the data to understand what, why, where and when the problem is, and work to develop plans for how to address it through strategic and targeted enforcement (NHTSA, 2009; WHO, 2010).

4. Considerations for improving policy and practice

The road policing capacity building work described above highlights some key regional lessons that are also likely applicable other regions. Generally, the GRSP capacity building model focuses on three recipient groups: police leaders, frontline operational officers, and internal police trainers. It is vital that all levels of an enforcement agency understand the importance of strategy and tactics to improve road safety outcomes (NHTSA, 2002; Queensland Police Service, 2019). Therefore, engagement with police leadership is vital and their understanding and support of efforts to adopt enhanced practices is critical to success.

Equally, it is essential to involve those police personnel who are responsible for training and professional development within their agency. In the interests of sustainability of training, it is critical to engage with those who will continue on with the training regime to spread it widely throughout an organisation, once international support ends (Shuey, 2019). Ho Chi Minh City provides a model example in this regard. The capacity building programme described above is implemented in that city with the full support of instructors from the People's Police Academy. Instructors from that Academy actively participate in the preparation and conduct of all GRSP training alongside international trainers, which enables a comprehensive training agenda with full appreciation of local contextual issues. In addition, training materials are used to develop training programs for PPA cadets to ensure information is transmitted to new enforcement agency members. There is a great need to ensure that knowledge and capacity are retained and transferred in the local policing agencies (Global Road Safety Partnership, 2008). Introducing this knowledge at the academy level will ensure that cadets are exposed to international good practice from the beginning of their career. Alternatively, the work described in the Philippines, where a national training regime for speed enforcement is being implemented that will filter down to regional and local levels is another way to help ensure widespread understanding and dissemination of key enforcement knowledge and practice.

Finally, there is a critical need for enforcement agencies to embrace the importance of collecting and analysing their own data to guide enforcement activities. Data-led enforcement can provide agencies with options for the efficient allocation of limited enforcement resources. Enforcement agencies face many competing challenges. Therefore, being able to determine where resources are best placed in order to make a positive impact on reducing road crashes and related road trauma is a critical task for enforcement agency leadership. If the road safety-related targets of the SDGs are to be met in the Asian region, enforcement agencies will need to better embrace comprehensive road safety legislation and enforcement of such.

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