

Implementing Police Station Based Budgeting in Pakistan

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Police station is the basic organizational and functional unit of police working. From a citizen's perspective, it is the gateway to criminal justice system. Legally, it is defined in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 as a provincially declared entity. The abstraction of this legal concept is deep rooted in discourse of police reforms that take into account police station reforms as part of larger justice sector reforms' project. Most of the analyses of police culture revolve in and around police stations. Historically, police stations were envisaged territorially and were designed to cater to rural policing. Later on, alongside the territorial conception of police stations, functional conception also emerged leading to establishment of subject specific police stations like women police stations, counter-terrorism department's police stations and excise related police stations. The territorial police stations, however, remained most prominent as the legal framework of criminal justice system is more bespoke to them as compared to functional police stations. Owing to the pivotal position of police stations within criminal justice system, a dedicated Police Station Enquiry Committee (M. A. K Chaudhry Report) was undertaken in 1976. In addition, keeping in view the statistical value of police stations in economic planning, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) recorded total number of police stations in the country. The PBS count shows Punjab having 705 (factually 720), Sindh having 566, KP having 281, Baluchistan having 125 and ICT having 22 Police Stations.

With 1714 police stations and their In-charges who deal directly with public, for some time, there has been a recommendation to introduce Police Station Based Budgeting (PSBB). Recently, the Sindh Police followed by KP Police and ICT Police took practical steps to introduce PSBB. The concept is innovative in the context of highly centralized police organizations. It plans to delegate financial powers to the service delivery units that have to deal first hand with public at large. The PSBB involves the following challenges, which can be turned into opportunities by police leadership by owning the initiative whole heartedly:

The first issue of administrative nature is the availability of a gazette officer to be designated as Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO). The KP Government got

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issued a notification declaring Station House Officers (SHOs) as DDOs under rule 3 of the General Financial Rules. The statutory notification not only notified SHOs of operations as DDOs, but also the In-charges of investigation as DDOs to enable them to draw and disburse public money. As against this, the Sindh, Punjab and ICT Police opted to use police rules to treat the existing SHOs/Inspectors/In-charges as 'gazetted officers' to disburse government money. There-engineering of legal rules to delegate financial powers to grassroots level is considered first step in the direction.

Second step was to identify the heads of accounts to be delegated to police stations. In this regards, the dominant view is to delegate contingency heads of accounts i.e., non-salary accounts. The delegation is tricky as it involves heads that require uniform provision of things like stationery. Nevertheless, in order to deliver on this important subject, the heads of accounts have been delegated. Karachi Police, for instance, took lead and delegated the POL/fuel, travelling allowance, telephone/ trunk calls and cost of investigation heads of accounts to police stations.

Third challenge will be to ensure that each expenditure is properly accounted for through documentation and is disbursed as planned. This task is easier said than done as the previous learning from the delegation of head of cost of investigation account proved problematic as despite its delegation, the junior police officers were not inclined to draw and disburse it due to discretion based accountability and police culture that serve as forces of inertia against such initiatives.

Fourthly, public accounts maintainability has become bureaucratic due to sanctions and multilayered accounting mechanisms. For this, the KP Police requisitioned creation of over two hundred posts of accountants to help the SHOs to exercise their powers. The problem of maintaining accounts, however, is of gigantic nature as it is difficult to manually keep account of small transactions. While the digital platform for public money disbursement will take a while to be enabled, it will be up to the police leadership to see that this point is smoothly addressed and junior officers encouraged and supported in utilizing the funds delegated to them.

Finally, as the law requires audit for every penny of the public money to be carried out, therefore, special audit regime, which would be both effective and efficient will be required. The present regime deals with big and small expenditures alike and therefore may be part of the problem than the solution