The world is brimming with indicators of justice and safety. From statistics on recorded crime and rates of victimization, to estimates of the global burden of armed violence, and compound indices of governance and the rule of law, national governments, civil society organizations, and development agencies are busily charting the world of justice and safety. Some indicators are conceived in London, Geneva, Paris, and New York, and radiate outward. A small but growing number of indicators are born in the developing world.

Since 2009, with funding from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management (PCJ) at Harvard Kennedy School has been supporting state officials and civil society organizations in Jamaica, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria to develop and use their own indicators to spark, reinforce, and communicate progress toward strategic goals in justice and safety. In 2010 the PCJ began collaborating with officials in Papua New Guinea (PNG), extending existing efforts in the law and justice sector funded by the Australian Government Aid Program (AusAID). In 2011 the PCJ began working with government officials in Bangladesh, and the following year, in 2012, the project added Ethiopia.

The aim of the project is to equip government and civil society organizations with the skills and experience to design their own indicators, routinely assess those indicators, and use them to drive meaningful reform in the justice sector. Building this capacity is a long-term undertaking, for the desire for indicators and the skill in their construction must permeate the organizational culture in governmental and non-governmental bodies. It is also a fluid process: indicators serve ambitions, policies, governments, and staffs that inevitably change over time. The prototype indicators developed in this project are different from the indicators in international systems created in the Global North for use in the Global South. They start by finding successes, however modest, and strengthen norms and standards that emerge in the course of reviewing local practices. They also perform different kinds of development work: They support domestic ambitions for justice and safety, reinforce management operations in government, and align the work of individual agencies with sector-wide goals. At the same time these and other examples of country-led indicator development complement the growing number of globally conceived indicator projects by grounding the measurement culture of international development in local customs, and by articulating domestic sources of legitimacy for the standards implicit in the norms in global indicator projects.

Introduction

This case study describes the rejection of a new indicator of police performance in Jamaica (the “quality clearance rate”) and the partial adoption of another – the “hit rate.” It first describes the reasons we believed the Jamaican Constabulary Force (JCF) would welcome an indicator of police performance about clearance rates and then analyzes why these beliefs were mistaken.

Next it describes the long and convoluted process by which a more ambitious yet narrowly-defined indicator was designed and tested, revised and re-tested, endorsed by the Commissioner and then haltingly adopted by local police commanders.

The case study broods on the difficulty of developing indicators that suit the multiplicity of interests inside a single police organization, despite the strong backing of its leader. It shows how the gulf between research and operations and the distance between headquarters and the front-line each affect the design of indicators and limit their impact on police practices.

The Quality Clearance Rate Indicator

In February 2010 a team of researchers from the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management at the Harvard Kennedy School made a presentation on “change management” to the senior leadership of the Jamaican Constabulary Force. Owen Ellington, who was appointed Acting Commissioner in November 2009, had asked for a briefing on the status of the collaboration on indicators that our Program had begun the previous year with a couple of senior superintendents in the JCF and the
Research and Evaluation Unit at the Ministry of National Security. Our colleagues in Jamaica hoped to persuade the new Commissioner of the value of the collaboration, which had begun under the command of his predecessor; they portrayed our work as support for the “modernization” of policing in Jamaica, official plans for which called for change in the core “values and culture” of the organization.¹

We hoped to convince the Commissioner of the utility of developing a new indicator of police performance, which was one of the main promised outputs in a program for which we had received support from the UK government’s Department for International Development.² In the middle of a long presentation on the challenges of measurement and management in justice and safety around the world, we proposed a prototype for an indicator of policing in Jamaica that we called the “quality clearance rate”. “Clearance rates” are used by many police agencies. Often they are the main internal measure of their performance. Typically they measure the proportion of major crimes recorded by the police that are later solved or closed in some way, usually without regard to the means by which cases are “cleared.”³ The indicator we proposed focused on the way specific cases (homicides) were solved, distinguishing “clear-ups” – as they were called in Jamaica – that came from “quality” work by the police and “clear-ups” that were the result of other events, including the death of the suspect. We focused on the method of clearance because nearly 10 percent of the clear-ups of recorded homicide in Jamaica in 2009 had resulted from the suspect’s death – a finding that came from delving into case-level data sets on recorded crime with researchers in the JCF and MNS. Roughly half of these deaths, we discovered, stemmed from a shooting by a police officer; the other half came from the violent action of witnesses and others near the scene of the crime. In both cases, we reasoned, the death of the suspect should not be counted as an indicator of the effectiveness of the police, not to mention an accomplishment of the justice system.

Indeed, clearance rates seemed to us to indicate very little about either police performance or justice. And yet clearance rates could not be completely abandoned; they are used by nearly all police forces around the world, and it was not obvious what might replace this rate as an indicator of “police performance” in Jamaica. Our colleagues in Kingston therefore decided to propose a slight adjustment. A “quality clearance,” they proposed, was one in which “a suspect was arrested due to direct police action or citizen cooperation made within three months of the recording of the offence.” We were excited by this definition and we were optimistic about the prospects for this prototype for several reasons.

First, the indicator was easy to generate and simple to understand, requiring only the disaggregation of data that the police already collected and disseminated on a routine basis. We wanted to avoid indicators that would be difficult for line staff and supervisors to produce, interpret, and use. Second, a “quality” clearance required more of the kind of policing that the JCF said it wanted – greater cooperation with witnesses and residents, effective and timely collaboration across agencies in the justice sector, diligent investigations by police


Figure 1.
Analysis of Change in “Quality Clearances” for Homicide, Jamaica, 2008-2009

Bar Chart showing Change in Quality Clearance Rates for Murders by Parish FY 2008/2009 (July)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Change in Quality Clearances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingston</td>
<td>-30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarendon</td>
<td>-40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas</td>
<td>-39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Elizabeth</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ann</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Mary</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>-43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trelawny</td>
<td>-75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

detectives, and the circumspect use of force, and lethal force in particular. Nearly all of the JCF’s programs for “transformation” championed these attributes of policing. We believed the indicator would tap into this reformist momentum. Third, the indicator varied over time and space, and it appeared to move in response to changes in police strategies and tactics. An early JCF analysis of trends in clearances, reproduced in Figure 1, revealed that “quality” clearances had increased 75 percent in one parish in 2009 and decreased 80 percent in another. The indicator, we thought, would register changes in police activity – homicide investigations, specifically – rather than shifts in violent crime. We thought it could serve as a valid proxy for police performance.

There were several other reasons we thought the indicator would be welcomed by the leadership of the JCF, all of which shaped our intuitive sense of the “political economy of police reform.”

First, the new Commissioner had pledged his support to a process of institutional reform already underway that promised a more professional, effective, and legitimate police force. The measurement in policing and the public sector generally in the United States, see Mark Moore, Recognizing Public Value, Harvard, 2013.


6 See for example, http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20091115/focus/focus1.html

Pitfalls in the Design of New Indicators of Police Performance: Lessons from Jamaica

Commissioner would need tangible signs of progress toward such lofty goals, we reasoned, in order to the value of his appointment to the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security.

Second, the JCF had a reputation for brutality and was routinely criticized by domestic and international organizations for the excessive use of lethal force. Several trials of police officers who had killed suspects, including children, ended in acquittal. An increase in “quality clearances,” we surmised, would show that the JCF was capable of curbing the use of force without the need for more independent investigations and public prosecutions of its officers. It would permit the police to claim progress in justice and safety, rights and security.

Third, the indicator we proposed capitalized on the pronounced concern with homicide on the island, and focused on a core activity of policing – the response to crime.

The homicide rate in Jamaica was at an all-high time in 2009 – 62 per 100,000 residents. But clearance rates were down – from about 40 percent in 2004 to 25 percent in 2009. The JCF, we hypothesized, was in the midst of a crisis of legitimacy and efficacy. The indicator, we believed, could help solve that crisis because the proportion of “quality clearances” had increased slightly over the preceding year.

Our proposal fell flat. One member of the senior leadership team of the JCF dismissed the indicator as “premature.” Others ignored our proposal or hemmed and hawed when we tried to put the idea back into the discussion of the measurement of police performance. To our surprise, none of the senior officers that had been seconded to the JCF by the London Metropolitan Police, including an assistant commissioner responsible for work on corruption and integrity, expressed support for the idea. We were disappointed, and flummoxed. What happened? Where did we go wrong? It has taken a while to stitch together a plausible answer. Candid feedback from our colleagues in Kingston has been rare – the result, perhaps, of their decorum in an ongoing collaboration. Even now we do not exhibit real command of the force and demonstrate understand all the reasons for the rejection of the idea of measuring “quality clearances.” But one problem is that the indicator disparaged an approach to policing that had considerable support inside the organization, and it did so in a covert and condescending manner. Some officers, we learned, thought that extrajudicial killings were an effective method of controlling crime, in part because they thought there was wide public support for it, and in part because they did not trust the judiciary to administer punishment swiftly or effectively. Others thought police shootings were almost always justified as a defensive reaction to hostile encounters with suspects and their protectors.

Many officers may have abjured the practice, but a large number wavered between these two poles of opinion. Our indicator ignored the strength and complexity of these views. It treated a pattern of police practice that we preferred as positive (as if it were a “best practice”) while making a pariah of its twin, a “poor clearance”. Instead of helping the JCF overcome what we considered to be an embarrassing, vestigial practice in policing, the quality clearance indicator may have made some members of the JCF dig in their heels defensively.

Another problem was the indicator had ambiguous implications for the priorities and management decisions of police supervisors. Should the JCF strive for zero “negative” clearances? If so, at what cost to the organization – in additional training for new recruits, supplementary investigations and new prosecutions of fatal shootings, and possibly fewer apprehended suspects and the prospect of additional homicides? Moreover, what if “quality clearances” went up but overall the clearance rate continued to fall? What inferences about institutional performance should supervisors draw in these circumstances? Not only, in other words, might progress along this indicator be very costly to the JCF; it competed with other invisible goals of the organization. A more serious problem was that the “quality clearance rate” tackled a problem on the
fringes of police modernization rather than the core of organizational transformation. It was, in effect, a side-show.

Investigations of homicide were considered a high priority by the Commissioner and commanded a lot of attention in the press, but they constituted a tiny fraction of all policing in Jamaica. In 2010 there were 1,442 homicides. The same year, there were two times more robberies and three times the number of break-ins, along with another 25,000 “minor offenses” – including assaults and thefts. These crimes may have evaded press coverage and yet they commanded the majority of police attention and resources. Homicide investigations, in short, had little in common with routine law enforcement practices – patrol, crime reports, and stops. The vast majority of officers never encountered a homicide. If the JCF was going to modernize and transform itself, an indicator of clearances was not going to do it.

The Hit Rate Indicator: A Coincidence
We were discouraged by the rejection of our proposed indicator, but the long presentation we made in Kingston about the measurement of justice and safety fortunately contained another prototype that somehow redeemed the idea of our collaboration. The prototype is reproduced below in a scatter plot chart that shows on the vertical axis the number of persons arrested and charged, firearms and ammunition seized, and wanted suspects held by the police in each of the 19 divisions across the island; all of these events are added up and simply counted as “hits”. On the other axis the chart recorded the total number for police searches of persons, vehicles and homes that were reported by each division.

We stumbled on the data that generated this chart just a few days before the presentation on change management. We were leafing through a stack of reports that the Ministry of Security received each week from the JCF, trying to make sense of the flow of information between the two agencies. This flow not only contained information on recorded crime and clearances, which commanded most of the MNS’s supervisory attention, but also police activities such as the number of deployments each week and the kind of patrol activities officers regularly engaged in (vehicle searches, pedestrian stops, “raids” and also “flag marches”).

Figure 2
The Hit Rate Prototype

![Graph showing Searches and Hits per JCF Division, 2009](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/indicators-of-safety-and-justice)
The report was termed “operational activities and returns,” and it recorded deployment counts by type and other actions, as well as the “results” compiled during the same recording period— including the number of guns and ammunition seized, the number of persons arrested and charged, the number of “wanted persons” that were held by the police. But the report did not relate results to activities, and no one in the JCF or MNS had yet tried to analyze their relationship. Nor was there an obvious logic behind the classification of key data elements – for example, “searches” were seen as a “result” rather than an “activity”. So we quickly plotted the relationship between the various types of searches reported and various subtypes of results (or “hits”) in a single chart.

We included the chart in our presentation to the Commissioner and his executive team with some trepidation because we were suspicious of the reliability of the data. The police in one division reported 420,000 searches in a single year – a startling number since there were only 2.7 million inhabitants on the island as a whole. But we thought we might provoke a desire to improve the quality of the information by taking it seriously. The data, after all, were taken seriously enough by the institution to be reported to headquarters, and surely, we reasoned, the Commissioner would want reliable reports from subordinates. We also thought the juxtaposition of searches and hits would raise important questions about the value of such frequent and intrusive police activity.

Searches, after all, represented a use of police force that had many direct and indirect costs. “Hits” were a partial measure of the yield or value that ensued from the search. We also believed the comparisons between divisions with relatively high and low yields, or “hits,” would enable the commissioner to encourage the adoption of practices in divisions with preferable results.

Commissioner Ellington was so intrigued by the chart that he asked for another opportunity to hear about the origin of the chart and its potential use in the organization. When he returned from other scheduled meetings later that day, he asked about the great spread of dots in the graph. He also asked for the names of the divisions associated with comparatively high and low hits. He then told us that the thought the chart could help cultivate a new approach to policing based on the “value added” by his agency to public safety. He asked us to deepen our work with the Research Planning and Legal Services Branch (RPLSB) of the JCF to refine the indicator – look for short-term variation, test different measures of hits –and also to collaborate with the national intelligence board, since, he said, more routine use of that organization’s information might lead to “higher hit rates”. We were thrilled. We thought we had stumbled on an indicator that could transform policing in Jamaica.

After the Prototype: Demolition and Reconstruction

We focused first on trying to improve the reliability of the information contained in the “hit rate indicator”. Neither the researchers at headquarters nor the divisional commanders whose clerks reported the results of operational activity truly believed the figures in the chart we showed the Commissioner. One assistant commissioner told us that divisional commanders intentionally “under-report and over-report” activities and results to preempt and also respond to questions from headquarters about what local divisions were doing in the face of changing levels of recorded crime. Other senior officials said that disagreements about what to count as a search and a “raid” explained the low reliability of the data. Coding manuals, training exercises, and protocols for auditing or checking the data simply did not exist, they told us. Instead, clerks in Kingston routinely called local divisions to clarify the meaning of data and resolve incongruities in the figures that were reported on an ad-hoc basis. We soon decided that further investigation into the
sources and extent of the inaccuracy and deception alienate the people and forces on whom any future implementation of the indicator would depend. This decision meant, though, that in order to improve the reliability of the data on searches and hits a pan-agency agreement on the precise meaning of terms such as “searches” and “raids” and “premises” would have to be reached. New protocols for data analysis also had to be established and incorporated into new reporting and dissemination routines.

Investments in new infrastructure and new accountability systems such as these were not part of our plan. We had been funded by DFID expressly to use existing systems of information, knowing well that many development projects get mired in new construction, cost over-runs, and the host of new problems of governance that new infrastructure often begets. So we supported the production of new protocols, but we did not wait for the organization to assimilate the new language and counting rules. Instead, we helped RPSLB orchestrate a pilot test of the hit rate indicator using existing data in the four divisions of Area 1, which is on the west end of the island. We hoped that the operationalization of the

would be unwise: It would take time and might idea there would force greater demand for accuracy in reporting everywhere and at the same time illustrate the utility of the indicator to local commanders. The test in Area 1 consisted primarily of presenting the analyses of the hit rate at weekly “tasking meetings” commanders convened in each of the four divisions that comprise Area 1 and then waiting to observe any changes in deployment patterns or results. We analyzed the findings from this first test in the fall of 2010. The four police divisions of Area 1 (Trelawny, St. James, Hannover, and Westmoreland) reported a combined total of 110,686 searches and 557 hits between August 20 and September 9. As the chart below shows, the relationship between searches and hits in Area 1 as a whole was volatile over this three week period, first rising then falling. The “hit rates” were much higher in St. James than Westmoreland (8 hits per 1,000 searches compared to 2 per 1,000), and also more volatile, with the hit rate doubling in the second week, and then falling by the same amount in the third. The hit rates themselves were dismayingly low, but we were excited by the variation across Area 1.

*Figure 3.*

*The Results of Law Enforcement Activity: Hit Rates in Area 1, initial pilot phase*
In fact, we thought the variation alone proved the utility of the indicator since it showed that some divisions were able to obtain more hits without more enforcement and intrusiveness. But the divisional commanders were not enthusiastic about the findings: The hit rates were disreputably low, and the comparisons across divisions raised uncomfortable questions for those with especially low yields. Worse, we could not be sure this variation was not the results of different practices in recording and reporting across the divisions – after all, the data feeding the hit rate indicator originated from station-level reports with disparate recording practices.

A further problem was that the prototype generated more work for operations officers and clerks who were already overwhelmed with reporting requirements emanating from Kingston. Plus, there was no sense of how the new hit rate reports could be linked to management decisions on deployments or patrol briefings.

The consequence of this inconclusive test, then, was that RPLSB recommended that a revised version of the hit rate indicator be based on a new stand-alone paper-and-pencil form to be filled by each JCF deployment, which would capture searches, other operational activities, and results. The Commissioner backed this plan, including not only the form but also the process by which the information needed to be compiled – a sign, we thought, of both his respect for the leader of RPLSB and for the indicator. But it meant a much longer development project.

The form developed for this revised plan for generating the indicator is reproduced below in Figure 4. Unlike the aggregate reports generated with existing data, the new form allowed analysts to pin-down hit rates for specific deployments, neighborhoods, and JCF teams. This information could be compared across any of these dimensions.

Figure 4.

Paper forms of the hit rate tested in 2011
It also could be validated through new and expanded accountability mechanisms: Team leaders for each deployment were required to sign the forms, and the data was to be entered in a separate repository that could be audited by supervisors and researchers at headquarters. The form was not self-standing or self-executing, though, it had to be accompanied by a series of auxiliary documents and further technical assistance in order to facilitate the coding and reporting of information (including training on the “counting rules” and “data dictionary” for data clerks). Many more “sensitization” workshops were conducted by the RPLSB before the new forms were pilot-tested in two separate divisions in the capital area of Kingston in early 2011.

This second pilot of the prototype was also a disappointment. The data collection process was seen by line officers as too onerous, and our audits found that results were still inconsistently recorded. In addition, the whole process was a logistical nightmare in terms of disseminating blank forms, collating them at the local level and then entering them into a central digital repository. Still worse the new form was resented by divisional commanders, who saw it as yet another mechanism by which to hold them accountable to headquarters rather than a new tool that could enhance the precision of their decision-making and boost the effectiveness of their deployments. Their pushback induced the RPLSB to abandon the new form and system for generating the hit rate. Its rejection by local commanders sent us back to the proverbial drawing board.

**The Control Room**

We felt defeated during some of our trips to Kingston in late 2011. Our colleagues at RPLSB were visibly fatigued from the effort they put into the “paper-form” of the hit rate, and they were frustrated by a wide array of challenges in implementing even a pilot: There were tedious shortages of paper needed to print the form; there were high rates of turnover in data clerks; and local commanders were often unresponsive to requests for meetings, not to mention closer scrutiny of the information being recorded. Our colleagues were also vexed by the lack of obvious alternatives to collecting data that would ensure a modicum of integrity in the prototype. We wondered: Should the hit rate only be implemented in divisions that were well-resourced and enthusiastic about the idea? Or should the hit rate be scrapped all together?

We decided to enlist members of the Operations Branch of the JCF to help us figure out what went wrong with the pilot and what we could do next. When we asked Deputy Commissioner Hinds and his staff what they thought, they suggested the “control room” as a source of the data required to generate the hit rate. This was an interesting suggestion as their feedback was not to rely on the operational reports compiled by the branch on a routine basis, but to “go straight to the source of real-time information.”

The “control room” is the command center of the JCF. It includes several dispatch operators that receive information via radio or phone on patrol activities – their location, the number of officers involved (“strength of party”), and type of actions taken. It also employs operators that receive residents’ calls for service – complaints about neighbors, reports of crime, etc. This large volume of information is entered in super-sized log-books with time stamps and brief hand-written narratives of special events. Three of these rooms operate throughout Jamaica. The one we visited was the busiest one, covering all of Kingston metropolitan area and it was literally next door to the Office of the JCF Commissioner – two desirable characteristics that could help us with the new pilot. We discovered that while most leaders of shifts and deployments routinely radioed-in at the beginning of their tour of duty, only about one in ten patrols regularly reported back at the end of their shift; when they did report, messages were inconsistently delivered, often narrowly focusing on weapons seized or arrests. There was no standard for reporting practices or interfacing with other data elements such as the number of projected patrols or crime reports. Furthermore, the data assembled in the control room was not cross-referenced with other reports at the divisional or station level (“patrol” or “crime” books, or radio-logs). As a consequence, the use of the centralized system of control rooms actually resulted in low coverage and weak reliability.
in the reporting of operational activities and their results. In retrospect, this data collection strategy also held little hope for long-term success, as it removed divisional actors from the process of collating, analyzing and managing the new information, and thus from some kind of “ownership” of the hit rate.

In late 2012 we briefed the Commissioner and his strategic team on the results of what we termed a “treasure hunt” in the Kingston control room. We said we were pleased with the more fluid collaboration with Operations, but we reported a lack of confidence that most activities were accurately captured by the JCF’s centralized, real-time system. The Commissioner did not seem surprised or perturbed by the gap between patrol “sign-ins” and “sign-outs” or the lack of consistency in the reporting of results. Instead of inquiring about the specifics of the gaps we noticed – what divisions or officer appeared to be more non-compliant – he suggested to us yet another way of moving forward with the project. He said that he “personally” got emails “everyday” with operational reports straight from each division, and he believed the reports he received. He told us to consider shift commanders as a way to get the information required by the hit rate. Mr. Ellington’s advice, like Mr. Hinds’, encouraged us to get closer to the “source” of information – nowhere near actual deployments, but closer to the front-line than the centralized control rooms.

We reviewed the emails received by the Commissioner. Some emails included a table and seemed to follow a clear reporting structure; others were simply typed and lacked a clear or consistent format. But we noticed common elements in the correspondence that allowed us to suggest a single structure for future reports that would follow the organic and intuitive scheme that shift commanders had devised. RPLSB then devised a web-based platform that collects local reports that are uploaded by local data clerks using information that is collated by shift commanders from deployments under their supervision.

This system then replaced the existing JCF platform for the collection of operational activity in the entire country, making it the official and unique repository of agency activities and results. This version of the design of the hit rate indicator involved a wager on the role of divisional shift commanders as aggregators of information produced by each deployment. The decision to use this source was a compromise between the need to collect detailed yet reliable data at the level of each deployment, on the one hand, and the possibility to carry-out such a mandate with few resources, a tight timeline, and relatively autonomous divisional commanders on the other.

Commissioner Ellington institutionalized this version of the hit rate across the island through a set of “force orders” issued in October of 2013. An earlier version of the hit rate that had been recommended was introduced in a separate set of orders in February 2012, but without reference to the system of information by which it was to be generated, nor to the joint supervisory role of RPLSB and Operations. In these new orders the Commissioner emphasized the support role to be played by both the RPLSB and the Operations Branches of the JCF for the local collection of data and the analyses and uses of this information at the level of each division, and recommended the use of the hit rate at weekly “tasking meetings.” In this way, one aspect of the issue of “ownership” of the hit rate was addressed, with shared responsibilities by those who designed the tool – Research – with those in charge of implementation – Operations. This match, moreover, was to take place not only centrally, but at the level of each division, with data or “shift clerks” compiling data but also generating analyses and contributing to conversation on management by divisional commanders.

**The Hit Rate in Action**

The “hit rate” today is similar in shape to the original prototype: it measures the relationship between key operational results or “hits” and the amount of law

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7 “Force orders” are the official means by which the JCF disseminates administrative policies and notifications to its staff. According to one senior JCF commander, they are “the voice of the Commissioner speaking” (see http://www.jcf.gov.jm/press-room/force-orders)
enforcement activity conducted during police deployments. The hit rate itself (the number of “hits” per 1,000 searches) facilitates the review of the performance of individual divisions and stations not only in terms of the volume of searches or the overall pattern of results, but also in terms of the yield associated with searches, deployments and other operational activities. But the function and utility of the hit rate is different from the original design.

The hit rate today is not the uber-indicator of police effectiveness that we originally imagined. Nor is it intended to solve the problems of overly intrusive law enforcement. Instead, the hit rate is part of a basket of indicators containing different measures of police performance for a bundle of diverse operations in the JCF – some based on searches, others based on deployments. For example, the same data that tracks changes in the number of “hits” per 1,000 searches permits police supervisors to monitor changes in other indicators of police effectiveness, including the proportion of all deployments with any “hits” or other desired results (e.g., tickets, drugs seized), and patterns of success in operations based on staffing patterns (e.g., officer-led operations, vs. constable-led operations), type of deployment (e.g., raids vs. spot checks), or patrol area (e.g., by station or divisions).

The hit rate also induces a conversation about the use of scarce police resources, and thus a more careful distinction between efficiency and effectiveness – concepts that are often twinned in debates about police performance. Much of this information is summarized in pre-defined reports and charts that are created at the divisional level such as the one displayed in Figure 5, showing daily variation in the two main indicators of “effective” police operations in Trelawny (hits per 1,000 searches and percentage of deployments with hits).

Figure 5.
Two Measures of the Effectiveness of Operations - Trelawny (09/2013)
This information can be tied to deployment patterns and other management decisions to inform better practices (staffing of deployments, date/time and location of operations, etc.). It can also be tailored to local needs. For example, the Operational Officer in St. James told us that his team uses the same data behind the hit rate to analyze trends in the efforts of police to find counterfeit goods and drugs, which are perceived to be a greater problem than arms in that area.

In short, in the process of its absorption into the daily operations of the JCF, the hit rate indicator has been converted into a management multi-tool – documenting in a timely way a vast array of operational activities and results. It helps central administrators track the performance of different divisions, but it is not purely an accountability mechanism, for the rate at the same time allows local commanders to pursue a measure of “effectiveness” that suits local interests and priorities. Indeed, the local utility of the indicator may be a more important condition of its use than the Commissioner’s orders.

The fact that local commanders receive analytical services in exchange for the reporting work they do also diminishes the instrumentalism of this particular management tool. It acknowledges and may even model a more dynamic and possibly reciprocal relationship between local divisions and headquarters.

Unlike the previous island-wide system employed by the JCF to track operations, the hit rate indicator is now compiled almost in “real time”. There is a one-day delay in data entry, which is far faster than the weekly reports on which it relied in the past. It also means that decisions about deployments and activities can be implemented on the basis of current information and modified quickly in response to crime patterns and crime-control resources that shift significantly from day to day. More critically, under the new system, clerks and commanders may select different reporting dates and periods to better address their own needs and routines. For example, not all tasking meetings occur on Mondays. Under the old system, all reports on activities across the island used the same form and time frame (7-days, Friday to Thursday). The new system is also versatile in terms of the analyses and products it supports: Clerks and commanders may create their own customized reports – for example, in connection with counterfeited goods in St. James, or to highlight “disputes settled” as an indicator of patrol performance in St. Catherine South. This strengthens the process of local adoption of the indicator and its data collection/analysis platform, while also providing guidance on how to “manage” figures and measures without stifling local innovation – commanders use the hit rate but can create additional reporting mechanisms that work to advance their local agendas.

The diversification of the hit rate’s function may be good for the evolution of policing in Jamaica in many ways — even if it does not decisively reduce the intrusiveness of law enforcement or resolutely increase the effectiveness of policing. First, the more fungible format of the hit rate expands the array of police activities that get counted and may have value for the community. For example, “dispute settlement” is one of the frequent outcomes of a police deployment, and yet this important result was never included in the operational returns the JCF used to forward to the MNS. School visits may contribute a lot to community policing and public safety, but they would have been overlooked by the original design of the hit rate.

Second, the new source of the hit rate can facilitate more robust evaluation designs for specific police practices, as well as in terms of local policies and strategies – for example, tracking interventions and impacts in areas or neighborhoods (rather than entire divisions), and over days/times rather than fixed time-periods. The JCF is more likely to become an agile, feedback-driven police agency if it can incorporate the results of its own evaluations into practice rather than waiting for external assessments of the impact of individual programs.
Third, the hit rate itself might provoke more careful consideration of the diverse costs of policing, including the impact on communities of intensive and intrusive activities, such as searches. For example, the Commissioner recently highlighted the hit rate’s potential as a source of a measure of the “transparency” of the police – although that potential has yet to be tapped.8

Reflections on the Hit Rate

The hit rate has taken what seems to us like a very long time to be incorporated into the management routines of the JCF, despite substantial support in and around policing. The Commissioner of the JCF was quite keen on the version of the indicator he saw in 2010, and even at an early stage of its development, the Commissioner asked us to make presentations of the indicator to the strategic leadership of the JCF, including the Operational Strategic Group, which is the quarterly forum of all area commanders at which important policy decisions are taken. The Police Civilian Oversight Committee, which has been absorbed into the new Independent Commission on Investigations, also embraced the indicator, deciding in 2011 to make the hit rate one of the measures by which the Commissioner’s performance was to be judged. The head of the Research, Planning and Legal Services Branch, now an assistant commissioner, has advocated for its wider use throughout the organization. Nevertheless, two years passed before the Commissioner’s “force orders” made the hit rate an official part of the performance regimen of the JCF. It took another year before a reliable and agreeable system for generating accurate data for the indicator was built. Only now is the indicator beginning to fit into system of managing the police in Jamaica.

Why did an innovation that had the unambiguous backing of the Commissioner and other authorities take so long to move from prototype to pilot to practice? What does the duration and trajectory of the development of the hit rate indicator teach us about foreign assistance in efforts to improve policing? What does its partial and grudging adoption by front-line commanders say about the role of centrally developed indicators in “change management”? What lesson for development assistance might we draw from our exaggerated expectations of the clearance rate and high hopes for the hit rate?

Looking for Lessons

Police agencies are not typically perceived as organizations with competing interests, divided loyalties, multiple objectives, and changing priorities. But they often are just this – a conglomeration of interests and a collection of functions that do not naturally align or harmoniously operate under the command of a single and unifying authority. In our experience with the hit rate, the actual leadership of the JCF turned out to be several individuals and multiple subgroups that did not automatically support or even acquiesce to a specific project or goal. It certainly did not resemble the board of a corporation with a single “bottom line”. And yet our project left out of the process of indicator development an appreciation of this complexity and “context”. It lacked a strategy for working within the constraints of this particular political economy.

It may be there is no lesson here for anyone but ourselves. Perhaps we simply mistook the interest in clearance rates among a few senior researchers as a welcome opportunity for institutional change. Perhaps we overlooked the potential for resistance to the hit rate in a way that more sophisticated researchers and experienced practitioners would not. And yet similar lapses appear to be a part of the experiences of police reform in other contexts, too, with foreigners consistently overestimating the coherence of the domestic demand for change.9

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9 See Policing the Context, cited in footnote 4, for many other examples of misreading the “political economy” of police reform.
Indicator projects in particular seem to suffer from a similar set of ailments – the assumption that the intelligence of the indicator itself can create organizational consensus, and that the firm support from a principle (a minister, a commissioner) constitutes domestic “ownership” of an agenda for change.

Of course, not all opposition to change in policing is principled and organized, but even when resistance is really just recalcitrance, the multiplicity of interests within a police organization can itself generate rational objections to particular innovations. This multiplicity matters greatly, too, for where one “starts” the development of an indicator and the likely duration of its incubation. Where the starting place or “entry point” for indicator development is an operational actor (an investigations department, for example) the impact on policy of the adoption of a new indicator may be quick, but the data capture and analytical capability that are required to support the measure may only be put in place slowly, as champions and partners for indicator development may have difficulty relating such activity to core tasks in operations.

By contrast, where the starting point is a research unit or individual champion of analysis and “big data,” the opposite may be true: knowledge may be created and disseminated quickly, but its impact on practice may be slow and depend greatly on the proverbial buy-in of other actors.

The development of the hit rate in Jamaica was begun and led by a research entity, the RPSLB. The “transfer” of this responsibility to Operations was anything but straightforward. Indeed, for Operations, the hit rate was always a bossy research project with limited applications: It was considered impractical by local commanders, and found to be inconsistent with existing recording and reporting practices.

Some of the resistance was the result of principled opposition: The hit rate seemed foreign-born and appeared to privilege goals that were alien to the culture of policing in Jamaica. Some of it was the result of inertia – a reaction to the inconvenience of innovation. But even that “bureaucratic” opposition subsided only partially with the formal support of the Commissioner, and it did not end with the repeated demonstration of the hit rate’s utility from central researchers. Nor was it solved by technical assistance from headquarters to facilitate the additional work that the hit rate required.

Indeed, much of the resistance to the hit rate is still alive today in a perpetual organizational debate about the division of labor and optimal format of data collection that guides operations and research. It is as if internal disagreement about priorities, values, and performance is an inherent part of a police organization, to which the only politically appropriate response is adjustment and accommodation.

In Jamaica this adjustment and accommodation took place along two axes. First, the Research Planning and Legal Services Branch had to demonstrate to Operations repeatedly that the reports to which it was accustomed could and would be reproduced with better data.

Research, in other words, had to justify to Operations its claim about the value of the hit rate not with proof of its scientific virtue, but with evidence of its loyalty to the culture of the organization. Second, adjustment and accommodation meant that the new system for the hit rate had to include ways to account for operational activities that mattered a lot locally but not so much centrally (such as “dispute settlement”). It meant taking seriously not only the administrative burden of the new indicator but some of its perceived opportunity costs as well.

In other words headquarters had to absorb the concerns of the front-line, and not just make conciliatory gestures or refute claims that the hit rate represented a recentralization of power in policing. Without an actual exchange of influence and power between Research and Operations, and between headquarters and the front-line, even the most
earnest process for obtaining “feedback” from “stakeholders” on the hit rate resembled yet another exercise in accountability and monitoring. These axial divisions between the interests, obligations, and roles of Research and Operations, on the one hand, and headquarters and the front-line, on the other, are a big part of the political economy of policing, and yet they did not figure prominently in our analysis of the prospects for the adoption of the hit rate indicator.

Our notion of political economy centered on four concepts: Convenience, sensitivity, momentum, and leadership. We anticipated minimal resistance to innovations that were administratively convenient – ones that did not generate new recording systems and reporting requirements or introduce new infrastructure and otherwise entail new and direct administrative costs. We expected a welcome reception to an indicator that would move quickly and markedly in response to minor adjustments in current practices.

We thought the JCF’s documented endorsement of a host of new principles of policing represented a credible commitment to organizational transformation, a powerful change in the tide that would sweep in new managerial practices. We also thought the Commissioner’s personal need for an achievement that was responsive to public criticism and distinct from those of his predecessors would generate sufficient force to overcome both principled and unprincipled resistance to innovation. And yet the structural binds in policing may be unaffected by these forces.

This mistake or oversight, too, may be personal and idiosyncratic rather than the source of a “lesson” for others or an insight for the field of justice reform and development assistance as a whole. But then again it may be a reflection of a general problem with foreign development projects that seek to influence domestic systems of governance and treat the adoption of a particular practice as a sign of progress in justice and safety. Even indicators that are not Trojan Horses can be alienating impositions. They have to fit into an ecosystem of goals in policing – many of which are neither explicit nor known to the organization before they come under pressure. Perhaps a final reflection is about the role of research in police reform and the special character that research may need in order to have catalytic power.

Knowledge is not power. Research does not drive innovation by itself, and “research and development” are not causally or sequentially related to one another. This much may be obvious to anyone in the operations side of any government department. But the prestige accorded to research institutions and the cult of data in particular in development programs today may be misleading. It is probably misplaced in the case of police reform. Research departments inside police agencies are not natural engines of innovation; their main purpose is the maintenance of current operations through the monitoring of existing practices and the detection of deviance from the rules.

There is little room for exploration or innovation as these departments are besieged by mandatory reports (“audits”) for a variety of internal and external audiences, and often must respond to urgent requests for data and findings that help counteract critical media reports (for example, reports on police shootings) or address an inquiry from top officials (on, say, arrest practices in a particular division).

The scientific “evaluation” of programs is a relatively new addition to the repertoire of research bodies in police institutions, and even then evaluation is fundamentally a retrospective operation, not a forward-looking, future-provoking act. “Analysis” in police research is often short-hand for “statistics” rather than metonymy for discovery and deconstruction.

In our case the kind of research required to propel the hit rate forward was unconventional. It ran against local customs; it treated convention as passé; it had to distort the vision of divisional commanders so they could see unappealing patterns in operations and not flinch at the view. It also had to assume there
was no clear norm, no obvious standard by which to judge performance. It required the consideration of scenarios, not counterfactuals. Researchers had to answer the question: What would the hit rate have to look like in order for this organization to be considered “better”?

Research with these traits is rare, even outside of police departments – in academic centers and advocacy organizations and foreign development institutions. It is tempting for all of these organizations to use research as an audit of existing operations, an exercise that treats a match between the planned and actual number of activities (patrols, trainings, inspections) as an accomplishment. It is probably unrealistic to expect a different kind of research to survive, let alone thrive, inside government bodies on its own.

Perhaps it is not advisable to encourage research along these lines within police research departments. Perhaps this kind of work is more suitable for “planning” institutions, where projections for the future are not expected to comply with or be bound by current laws and notions of what is good, but rather shaped by new models and big ideas. Whatever the case, research support for indicators which advance uncertain and changing domestic ambitions will need a source of sustenance that lies beyond current conventions in police agencies and academic institutions.

The hit rate has not transformed the JCF as an organization. It has not ended the problem of intrusive law enforcement searches, vindicated the human rights of criminal suspects, or solved the problem of violent crime on the island. Some local divisions use the hit rate more actively and innovatively than others. Sometimes it is used for goals and assignments that were not anticipated and may seem to central researchers to be “off-license.” But the hit rate migrates in and out of conversations about more legitimate and democratic policing in Jamaica, and it appears to be the source of some genuine organizational introspection. Perhaps its use for purposes other than those for which it was designed is a measure of its utility and value.

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