Overview of PRI's work in South Asia

Background

PRI has worked in the South Asia region since the mid-1990s. Key challenges identified in the region at that time included:

- Arbitrary procedures for arrest and detention with a particular bias towards the poor and marginalised
- Lengthy periods of pre-trial detention
- Repressive and outdated methods of prison management and poor prison conditions
- Lack of alternative measures to imprisonment
- Lack of adequate measures for rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners resulting in high rates of recidivism

PRI's intervention in the region has been at three levels:

a. Regional and in-country advocacy to address policy and law reform
b. In-country technical assistance to improve conditions of incarceration and promote access to justice
c. Capacity building for key stakeholders in the criminal justice system and in particular the prison administration

We have worked through partnerships with local NGOs who focus on criminal justice reform and support to vulnerable prisoners such as women and children in conflict with the law. We have also collaborated closely with the relevant prison, probation, police officials and the judiciary.

PRI's work in South Asia, 1990-2005

PRI's engagement in the region can be broadly divided into two phases: 1990s-2005 and 2010-current.

Our work during 1990s-2005 included:

- Setting up of PRAJA: Penal Reform and Justice Association of India, based in Delhi.

- Assessment visits.

- Regional Conferences in Kathmandu (1999) and Dhaka (2002), the latter focused on pre-trial, women and juveniles.

- DFID Models of Accessible Justice project.

- Setting up of PRI South Asia regional office in Kathmandu (now closed).

- Project work in 5 countries including:

  - Assessing and documenting effective intervention models for accessible justice: including 'Madaripur model of mediation' and 'Open prisons in India'.

- India: Indo-British Training Project on Human Rights and Prison Management, , with PRAJA, National Human Rights Commission, Bureau of Police Research and Development, and ICPS. Supported by the FCO. (1999-2000)
- Bangladesh: PRI together with PRAJA, BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) and the Bangladesh Home Ministry and Prisons Department, and with support from the FCO and DFID, developed and delivered a training for trainers for prison personnel on international standards, global and regional good practice and practical skills. (2000)
- Pakistan and India: Support for vulnerable groups of prisoners: notably women and children, focusing on mental health of women in prison, mediation, counselling and conflict resolution for women in prison, promoting new models of accessible justice for women and children in conflict with the law, and documenting women's experience in the criminal justice system.
- Pakistan: PRI worked closely with the DOST Welfare Foundation to set up a national advocacy network (Juvenile Justice forum) and work in specific prisons (Lahore, Peshawar) to deliver improvements in conditions for imprisoned women and children.

PRI's work in South Asia, 2011-2014

During 2011-14, PRI was able to re-engage with local partners and build on previous work with stakeholders in the region, due to the support of our PPA grant from the UK Government (DFID) and a grant from the FCO.

The key issues that still prevail within the region and need addressing include overcrowding, lack of alternative sanctions, poor training for prison officials and a lack of specialised systems and measures for vulnerable groups including women and children.

PRI developed its partnerships in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan to deliver work that falls within its strategic themes of Alternatives to imprisonment, Justice for children, and Women in the criminal justice system.

Activities include:

Bangladesh

- Training of prison staff and roundtables on the UN Bangkok Rules and needs and treatment of women in the criminal justice system. Translation of PRI's Bangkok Rules guidance into Bangla, and commitment from Ministry and Prison Directorate officials for changes to be made for women in prison.
- PRI and BLAST published a research report on violence against children in the criminal justice system in Bangladesh. This was followed by a roundtable to discuss findings and agree plans for moving forward with recommendations. A commentary on the new Children Act (2013) was produced by BLAST and Justice Imman Ali, PRI' Board member and Judge in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in Bangladesh.
- With BLAST, we produced a report on probation and alternatives to imprisonment in Bangladesh, followed by a national seminar to discuss findings and agree ways forward.

India

- PRI, together with PRAJA and the Academy of Prisons and Correctional Administration (APCA) in Vellore, have held trainings of trainers for South Indian

- prison managers and professionals drawn from four South Indian states and held seminars for national stakeholders to promote good prison practice.
- PRI is supporting ACPA to introduce training on the UN Bangkok Rules to all new prison officers trained.
- An exchange visit for high-level prison and probation officials from India to London was held, visiting prisons in England and Scotland to exchange experience and good practice.
- PRI co-hosted a three-day International Conference, with local NGO HAQ: Child Rights, on Juvenile Justice. International juvenile justice experts and representatives from partners in the region participated.
- PRI contributed to the successful campaign by local partners to uphold the Juvenile Justice Act (2000) and not to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility in India, following the rape case in December 2012. Following submissions, the Supreme Court upheld the Act.

Pakistan

- In partnership with DOST, PRI trained prison and probation personnel in Peshawar on good prison practice and alternatives to imprisonment.
- PRI commissioned a local expert to research and produce a report on the probation and parole system in Pakistan, which was followed by a national conference on improving prison conditions and promoting alternatives to imprisonment, Details here.
- PRI and DOST published of 'A review of law and policy to prevent and remedy violence against children in Pakistan' and produced a paper on documenting DOST best practices on Juvenile Justice.

PRI South Asia publications include:

- *Development and Use of the Probation System in Bangladesh* (PRI, BLAST, 2014)

- *Probation and parole system in Pakistan:* Assessment and recommendations for reform (PRI, DOST, 2013)

- *A review of law and policy to prevent and remedy violence against children in Pakistan.pdf* (PRI, DOST, 2013)

- *Prisons and Human Rights Training for Pakistan* report, (2011)

- *A review of law and policy to prevent and remedy violence against children in Bangladesh* (PRI, BLAST, 2013)

- Torture Prevention in South Asia (video), (PRI, Asian Human Rights Centre, 2011)

- *Mediation Manual* (MLAA, PRI, 2004)

- *Alternative Dispute Resolution: Community-based mediation as an auxiliary to formal justice in Bangladesh: the Madaripur Model of Mediation* (2003)

- *'Open prisons' in India* (PRI, PRAJA, 2002)

- *Creating a window to redress women's grievances: Research and documentation project on mediation, counselling and conflict resolution* (PRI, PRAJA, 2002)

- *Access to justice and penal reform: Special focus: under-trials, women and juveniles* (PRI and partners, Dhaka Conference Report 2002)

- *"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high": Mental health and care of women and children in prison in Andhra Pradesh* (PRI, PRAJA, 2001)

- *Explorations towards accessible and equitable justice in the South Asia region: problems and paradoxes of penal reform* (PRI, PRAJA, 1999)

- *Penal reform in South Asia: Recommendations for penal reform and access to justice* (PRI and partners, Kathmandu Conference Report 1999)

- *Indo-British training project on human rights and prison management* (1999)

July 2014