neighbouring communities has been raised for expansion of COP programmes, now run by The Asia Foundation, in their localities.

Non-government organisation Light House facilitates COP activities in six wards -- three in the municipality and three in Union Parishad (UP)-level -- in Bogra while Banchte Shekha in 12 wards in Jessore and Madaripur Legal Aid Association in 10 wards of Madaripur.

Encouraged by its successful COP programme experience in Indonesia, The Asia Foundation held a number of discussions with cross-sections of people across the country. One of the important issues of the discussions was the gap in understanding, trust and respect that divides citizens and police at community-level.

On receipt of endorsement of police headquarters, home ministry and prime minister's office, the Foundation first conducted a baseline survey in Bogra, Jessore and Madaripur in 2004 and found that citizens have little trust or confidence in the police and that they prefer to exhaust alternative remedies before seeking police assistance when threatened or affected by crime.



Sayema weeps as she narrates her ordeal.

"Police are perceived to have little sense of professional duty towards citizens and the citizens in turn have little appreciation of the challenges that police face in their duties," Rakib Ahsan, Asia Foundation programme officer, told *The Daily Star*.

The Forum, which consists of 15 to 25 members, was formed in each ward. With the ward commissioners as convenor, each CPF includes a police officer, a member of Ansar/Village Defence Party, representatives of women organisations, school principals and teachers, businesspersons, religious leaders and farmers while a representative of the facilitating NGO works as member secretary.

After people contact the Forum with a problem, a designated member records their problem, which are raised later at the monthly CPF meeting.

Several CPFs have formed five-member subcommittees on alternative dispute resolution that provide support in resolving conflicts that involve law and order issues or strained relations between citizens and police. After people inform them about any matter of dispute, it convenes arbitration to solve it and, if fails, recommends the matter to Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (Blast), which provides assistance for free.

CPF runs school programmes that raise student awareness of COP and address criminal justice issues of concern to young people, and community cultural, sporting and other events in which citizens and police can interact informally and get to know one another.

The Light House has set up six 'Objection Boxes' in the six wards.

Community information booths have been set up for disseminating information about COP and the role and activities of the CPF and advice on specific criminal justice issues.

To expedite CPF works, a 30-member Community Police Facilitating Forum has been formed with the Superintendent of Police as the head. It meets once in two months.

WHILE beginning the campaign, the CPF made announcements from loudspeakers, held meetings in the communities and religious leaders preached at the mosques every Friday for creating awareness among the community people.

To address drug addiction and drug peddling in the municipality and UP areas, the CPF met the addicts and their parents and provided them counselling. "Where detoxication at home failed, we admit them to treatment centres," said CPF organiser Nazrul Islam, adding that they have five such treatment centres in Bogra. Forty Seven of 789 addicts of Bogra have so far stopped usings drug as the CPF members provided counselling to about 10,000 drug users.

Several drug peddlers, meantime, were caught and handed over to the police station.

Eve-teasing was another thing that CPF successfully stopped.

"It became impossible for me to go to school as many youths used to stop me on the way and tease me," says Rozina Khatun, a class 10 student of Taposhi Rabeya School in Bogra. "But the situation changed after the CPF members intervened."