

URBAN SOCIETY

SECURITY

Overview of urban crime trends

Sustainable development in cities requires stable and safe environments, yet the increase in urban crime, despite interregional differences, has become a global problem. Since 1996, most Northern countries have seen a stabilization or gradual decrease in their relatively high crime rates, although juvenile crime continues to rise.¹ Social exclusion has aggravated youth crime and created a 'values-vacuum' evident in phenomena such as street children, youth gangs and school drop-outs. Youth crime has become increasingly violent and has even entrenched itself in learning institutions. Children who grow up in a violent environment are more susceptible to becoming abusive adults.

Developing countries have shown increased rates of urban crime and an exponential increase in youth crime. Being exposed to violence within poor families often results in an increase of street children. It is envisaged that violence will continue to grow in the urban areas of most developing countries, with

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A Local Model Of Crime Prevention - The Warwick Junction - Durban

One of the projects that serves as a model for crime fighting is the "Greater Warwick Avenue and Grey Street Urban Renewal Project" which led to a drop in crime in a troubled inner city area. The target area makes up a large portion of the central business district and includes the main bus stations, train stations, and taxi ranks through which 300,000 commuters pass daily. One element of its success was the provision of a venue - including office space - where multi-disciplinary project teams from various city departments were based, with rooms where community members and city representatives could meet. From there a multitude of successful projects were designed and implemented with the stakeholders.

The Role of Organized Crime

Organized crime is at the heart of much of the informal economy. Such a situation has arisen because many governments lack the political will, capability, or capacity to meet the needs of large numbers of low-income communities. This governance gap is filled by informal sector entrepreneurs and middle-men who 'allocate' public land to the poor, providing protection from police excesses while sharing profits with the police and relying on informal links with government functionaries. A host of other illegal activities, including drug pushing, prostitution, gambling and various forms of smuggling and black marketeering goes along with this. The required labour force is invariably recruited from the low-income communities whose needs they 'serve'. Organized crime cannot operate without the support of government functionaries, especially the police. This often makes organized crime the *de facto* government in low-income settlements. The inability of the state to provide services for the poor also leads to a failure to provide justice and protection, thus sustaining a system of violence, coercion and extortion in urban areas.

Source: Arif Hasan, 'Raising the Curtain on the Urban Drama: The Need for a New Approach in Living in Asian Cities, UNESCAP, Bangkok, 1996



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violent crime accounting for 25 to 30 percent of all crimes. In the cities of the South, crimes of violence almost equal crimes against property. In countries in transition, particularly in Eastern Europe, corruption and organized crime have recently threatened socio-economic progress.

Globally, the degree of urban violence has intensified. Violence and fear threaten the quality of life in society, good governance, sustainable development of communities, economic development and the social and political life of cities. Women especially are affected by violence, often in the form of physical and sexual abuse as well as harassment, frequently in their own homes. The increase in crime is associated with growing drug trafficking and the globalization of organized crime, widening out to include financial and housing speculation. Organized crime tends to draw on young delinquents as a source of cheap labour, exacerbating juvenile urban crime rates.

The private sector and crime prevention

The response of the traditional justice system to crime, particularly petty crime and anti-social behaviour is often haphazard, slow and costly. Worldwide, more emphasis is currently being given to major crime. In the cities of many

developing countries the police decline to enter poor neighbourhoods, leaving the inhabitants to resolve their own conflicts. Furthermore, in both developed and developing countries, the relationship between the police and the inhabitants is often characterized by distrust and fear.

For most governments, strengthening the police force has been the main response to the rise in violence and crime, but there is growing consensus that police alone cannot be expected to ensure security and safety within cities. This has resulted in a worldwide proliferation of private security services and neighbourhood watch groups. Furthermore, the private security industry in developing countries is increasingly taking responsibility for providing security both for citizens and businesses, raising questions about the apparent lack of control by states over security. It also raises questions of accountability, transparency and cooperation within the criminal justice system. One new trend is for police to work more closely with citizens to improve urban security. Where community policing has been successfully applied, it has shown that police are held more publicly accountable. An exceptional model of problem-oriented policing is found in Japan. Assuming that national security is best attained by maintaining the peace and the security of every community, the approach involves close cooperation between citizens and the police, also regarded as members of the community.

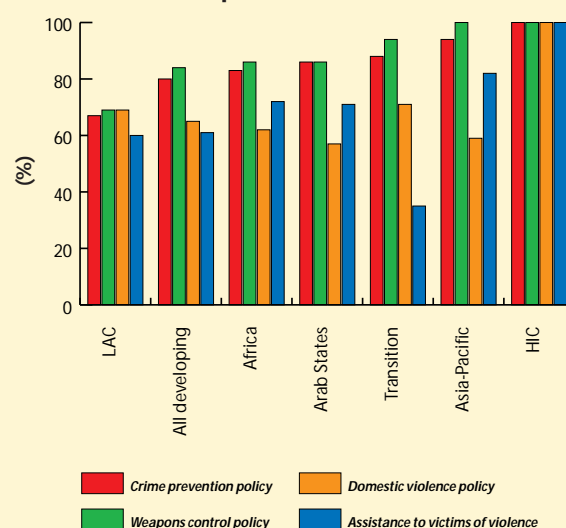
Many cities in developing countries, on the other hand, are witnessing an explosive growth of uncontrolled informal settlements and stigmatized neighbourhoods, along with gated communities for the rich. Mono-functional zoning and planning models have been a factor increasing spatial insecurity in cities, where areas without a social infrastructure invite criminal activity. Situational prevention, through organizing and improving public space, is an important part of reducing insecurity, and many cities are taking measures to reclaim and revitalize once notorious neighbourhoods.

Prevention at city level

Some central and local governments have attempted to reinforce security through applying zero-tolerance regimes, resulting in increased numbers of convictions. These measures have been difficult to administer, and are considered by some ethically questionable. As an alternative, some countries have chosen to promote closer cooperation between local authorities, new crime prevention partnerships, the inclusion of traditional leaders in justice delivery, support to vulnerable families, assistance to victims of violence, as well as the introduction of community policing.

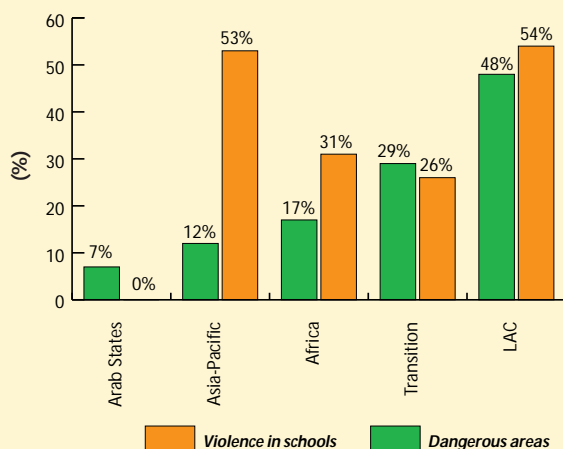
In the USA, several cities have developed successful programmes by making crime prevention everyone's business. In Canada, new forms of crime prevention include safety audits for women, and practices based on restorative justice. Municipal programmes continue to focus on youth crime and violence against women. In western Europe, new approaches have been developed through initiatives such as the European Forum for Urban Safety, which includes over 300 cities. In Africa, the Safer Cities approach pioneered by Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg has been replicated in Abidjan, Antananarivo, Dakar, Durban and Yaounde.

Crime prevention in cities



Most cities report the existence of crime prevention policies at the local level that include specific mechanisms and programmes such as community justice, community-policing, partnership between police, local authorities, NGOs and CBOs, etc. Weapons control policy, which include weapons licensing and fight against illicit weapons, are also largely reported. Assistance programmes for victims of violence and domestic violence policies are reported in most region. However, the success and extent of policy implementation remains to be verified in all these areas considering the high level of crime in many cities with policies in place.

Unsafe cities



This graph shows the proportion of cities in each region that have reported the existence of areas considered as inaccessible or dangerous to the police, and the existence of violence at school, among children. About one out of three cities in the world are affected. Latin American cities appear to be more unsafe with violence at school and unsafe areas reported for about half of the cities.

Local initiatives on crime and safety - Dar es Salaam

Safer Cities Dar es Salaam was launched in August 1998 and has become an important tool to create awareness, sensitize communities and build local capacity in crime prevention, in partnership with other stakeholders. NGOs and CBOs at community level have drawn up proposals with neighbourhood leaders for job-creation as a means of tackling the root causes of crime, as well as organizing community security groups (*sungusungu*). It has undertaken a survey of victims as well as a profile analysis of offenders to improve knowledge on crime while providing local authorities with forms of crime-measurement.