Violence in the Central American Region:
Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction

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Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction

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Contents

Figures

Charts

Acknowledgements

1. Executive Summary - Regional Guidelines for Violence Reduction Interventions

1.1 Guideline Objectives

The objective of these guidelines, and the associated background report 'Violence in the Central American Region', is to assist the UK Department of International Development (DFID) and the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida) in their development of an integrated approach to violence reduction interventions in the Central American region. This is intended to facilitate both agencies in their efforts to undertake the following tasks:

- Define a future over-arching framework when designing related programmes
- Mainstream such an understanding in all future poverty reduction strategies and development co-operation in Central America
- Inform key partners of the current dynamics of violence as well as potential approaches to violence reduction

The guidelines outline a three-phased approach, each with associated objectives and tools. These are summarised in Table i, and then briefly elaborated below. In each case some of the most important findings from the regional background report are included.

Table i Guideline phases: violence reduction interventions in Central America

Phase	Objective	Tool
1.Analytical	To distinguish the different components of a holistic approach to understanding violence	*Conceptual Framework for Understanding Violence*
2. Descriptive	To systematically map the different types and manifestations of violence	*Roadmap of Types of Violence*
3. Operational	To identify the diversity of appropriate violence reduction interventions at different levels	*Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction*

1.2 The Conceptual Framework for Understanding Violence

To better understand the complexity of everyday violence in the lives of poor communities in the four different counties in the region – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – requires a holistic integrated approach that recognises the multifaceted, interrelated nature of the phenomenon. The overall conceptual framework, as shown in Table ii, identifies five critical components that it is necessary to address for appropriate interventions to be developed.

At the outset it is necessary to agree on a working definition as to what is meant by violence. Despite a lack of overall agreement as to what constitutes this complex phenomenon, the guidelines follow generic definitions that identify it as the use of physical force, which causes hurt to others in order to impose ones' wishes. This refers to the 'unwanted physical interference by groups and/or individuals with the bodies of others'. Underlying this is recognition that violence involves the exercise of power that is invariably used to legitimate the use of force for specific gains.

At the same time it is critical to recognise the levels of fear and insecurity that are closely associated with violence. As much as violence itself these pervade people's lives, particularly those that have experienced decades of conflict. They can be exacerbated not only by the high visibility and reporting rates of particular types of violence, but also by the media, which plays a significant role in reflecting, shaping, and even distorting public opinion.

Table ii Conceptual framework for understanding violence in Central America

Section	Components of framework	Examples of critical issues
1	*Characteristics of multiple complexity of everyday violence* ▪ Definitions ▪ Categories ▪ Measurements	▪ Perceptions of overwhelming nature of routinised violence in daily life ▪ Use of physical force causing hurt physical/psychological hurt ▪ Political / Institutional ▪ Economic ▪ Social ▪ Importance of both quantitative and qualitative data on violence
2	*Causal factors underpinning the multiplicity of violence* ▪ Historical context of political violence ▪ Causes of economic and social violence	▪ Importance of structure, identity and agency in terms of both perpetrators and victims of violence ▪ Influence over the past decades of structural political/institutional violence on everyday violence ▪ Proliferation of arms ▪ Regional migration ▪ Inequality and poverty
3	*Costs and consequences of violence*	Erosion or reconstitution of livelihood assets and associated capital ▪ Human ▪ Physical ▪ Financial ▪ Social ▪ Natural
4	*Operational Framework for interventions in the Central American Region* ▪ Current and emerging dominant violence reduction policy approaches	Holistic framework linking types of violence to different types and levels of intervention ▪ Criminal justice, transparency and the fight against corruption ▪ Public health ▪ Conflict transformation ▪ Human rights ▪ Social capital ▪ Citizen security ▪ Citizenship
5	*Ongoing violence related interventions* ▪ Key existing institutions ▪ Types of intervention	▪ International and regional level ▪ National level ▪ Local / municipal level ▪ Advocacy ▪ Research ▪ State programs ▪ Community projects

Findings from the Region

This background report highlights the manner in which such violence permeates the daily reality of life, especially in poor communities with different types overlapping each other to form a complex multiple layering of violent manifestations. This is partly the direct legacy of violently oppressive civil conflict and the fact that, although peace in terms of the cession of hostilities has been achieved, the transition to more democratic and egalitarian societies remains elusive. It is also because military conflict and political violence often has been replaced by an upsurge in social and economic violence, and with it the erosion of incipient democratic institutions.

At the same time the paper shows that data limitations present important challenges. Reliable comparable data is scarce, with measurements often varying according to sources. In addition, the nature of violence influences reporting rates. In the case of domestic and sexual violence, only a fraction of victims report their experiences. In many cases an inefficient police force and judicial system discourages people from reporting crime. Consequently, overall reported figures are a conservative estimate of actual violence levels, and where available, survey data may at times offer better approximations.
- One of the first challenges facing the region, therefore, is the development of more robust and reliable data sources

Despite such data limitations, however, there is evidence of dramatically high levels of homicide rates across the region, with 1998 average homicide rate in all of four countries over 10 times the global rate. In 1996, El Salvador topped global murder ranking statistics with a rate of 139 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. There are also alarming figures for Honduras, especially for the North of the country. Homicide rates show important variations based on variables such as age, ethnicity, geography and above all gender, with young men most likely to be the victims of homicide. While comparative statistical data is limited, a diversity of qualitative studies has focused on the different manifestations, perceptions and preoccupations relating to violence.

- A second challenge is the development of a more methodical approach to organising and analysing such information. This is particularly important, given the limitations of homicide statistics and the richness and importance of more qualitative data for furthering our understanding

1.3 Roadmap of Types of Violence

To develop violence prevention and reduction policies one of the most important steps of the second phase is to systematically map the multiple manifestations of violence. These then need to be systematically categorised into manageable groupings or types – at the same time as avoiding oversimplifications.

A useful starting point is an overarching typology that distinguishes between political/institutional violence, economic violence and social violence. Each type is identified in terms of the physical act that consciously or unconsciously is used to gain or maintain power. At the same time it is important to recognise that this three-fold typology forms a continuum with overlapping and interrelated reinforcing linkages between different types of violence. Within these broad categories the different types and manifestations of violence can be systematically mapped, as shown in Table iii.

Findings from the Region

a) Characteristics of violence across the region
In describing both similarities and differences, the background report highlights the following:

The importance of visibility
Levels of visibility vary both by country as well as by type of violence. This fundamentally influences public awareness, associated fear and insecurity, and tolerance level, relating to acceptable of violent behaviour.
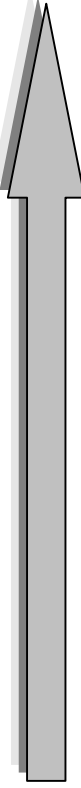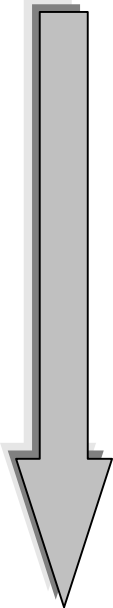
Delinquents and gangs have highly visible profiles across the region, particularly in El Salvador and Honduras, with tremendous pressure to develop and introduce interventions to reduce the economic and social violence associated with them. Since the resolution of political conflict it is the '*maras'*, or 'gangs', that have come to dominate public attention. In the case of Honduras, for instance, data shows that less than 5% of crime is caused by youths under 18 years of age, yet disproportionate media representation of this phenomenon has created what is termed 'prefabricated violence'.

In direct contrast, intra-household social violence including gender-based domestic violence, the abuse of children and inter-generation conflict is less visible with a very low profile. Despite its widespread nature, it is largely treated as a private family matter. Across the region, however, there are noted differences between levels of visibility and associated tolerance levels. In Nicaragua, for instance, domestic violence has a high profile, which may be more linked to extensive research than to higher levels per se than in other countries such as Honduras, where the issue is less studied and has a far lower public profile. Like domestic abuse against women, violence against children in the home is often invisible yet a worryingly widespread phenomenon, as are incidents of rape. Associated with both is widespread fear among children.

Finally the outcome, if not the act, of organised crime, is often visible – for instance in terms of levels of conspicuous consumption. However, the extreme danger associated with this level of economic violence, and the fact that it can be associated with state power, results in reluctance to address it.

Table iii Roadmap of types of violence in Central America

Primary direction of violence continuum	Category of violence	Types of violence by perpetrators and/or victims	Manifestations	Secondary direction of violence continuum
	Political / institutional	Institutional violence of the state and other 'informal' institutions Including the private sector	Extra-judicial killings by police State or community directed social cleansing of gangs, and street children Lynching	*State institutional violence resulting in lack of trust in police and judiciary system*
	Institutional / economic	Organised crime Business interests	Intimidation and violence as means of resolving economic disputes Kidnapping Armed Robbery Drug trafficking Car and other contraband activities Small arms dealing Trafficking in prostitutes and USA headed immigrants	
	Economic / social	Gangs (Maras)	Collective 'turf' violence; robbery, theft	
	Economic	Delinquency / robbery	Street theft; robbery	
	Economic/ social	Street children (boys and girls)	Petty theft	
Intra-household social violence results in youths leaving the home and at risk to variety of street violence	Social	Domestic violence between adults	Physical or psychological male–female abuse	
	Social	Child abuse : boys and girls	Physical and sexual abuse particularly prevalent in the case of step-fathers but also uncles,	
	Social	Inter-generational conflict between parent and children (both young and adults, particularly older people)	Physical and psychological abuse	
	Social	Gratuitous/routine daily violence	Lack of citizenship in areas such as traffic, road rage, bar fights and street confrontations	

The need to recognise random, gratuitous violence
A diversity of forms of random, ***gratuitous social violence*** pervade the daily lives of local populations that can be associated with a lack of, or limited conception of, citizenship – again with important contrast between different countries in the region. Such acts of violence as road rage, and other traffic-related violence, as well as bar brawls and other forms of aggressive street behaviour, are often not identified as violence as such, but are important to identify.

The significance of demystifying some common perceptions about the 'maras' (gangs)
Since the ubiquitous gang culture of the '*maras*' is the most visible, and often the most brutal, manifestation of Central American violence it is important to deconstruct some of prevailing myths about them, including the following:

- **All gangs have the same objectives:** It is important to differentiate between *bandas* that are gangs specifically structured around criminal (economic) violence and that may be closely linked to organised crime, and *maras,* that range from normal groups of friends to *bandas,* in terms of their level of criminality.
- **All youth are intrinsically violent:** Although '*maras*' are responsible for a range of social and economic violence, not *all* young people are intrinsically violent. Consequently not all gang activity is violent or illicit, not all delinquents are gang members, and not all young people are either (or both).
- **Gangs are exclusively a male phenomenon:** Although they are overwhelmingly a male phenomenon, some *maras* have female leaders, while, in a few cases, female only gangs exist.
- **Gang violence is exclusively economic in nature:** Although *maras* engage in economic violence, some of their violence is social. This is frequently linked to issues of peer group identity. It can also include the sexual abuse of young women.
- **Youth gangs are caused by violent motives:** Young people do not join gangs entirely due to violent aspirations, but rather in response to a number of social, economic and cultural factors. These culminate in their seeking in a gang what they do not find at home – understanding, communication and respect. Causes include the deportation of gang members from the US; intra-regional migration; the exclusion of youth in poor marginal urban; and precarious living conditions including severe overcrowding, the lack of recreational space, and the lack of basic services which all serve to weaken the socialisation function of the family.

The background paper concluded that if solutions are to be effective, they need to understand the complex factors influencing gang membership in order to specify what such interventions are intended to replace. This requires an approach that is capable of addressing the cyclical relationship between violence in the home and the violence in the form of gangs.

b) Causal factors underpinning violence
The background report highlighted three factors as particularly pertinent at the structural level:

The legacy of political violence and conflict in the region
Despite the peace accords, political/institutional violence has not been entirely eradicated. Extra-judicial killings by police officers and members of paramilitary organisations remain a problem, as do allegations of 'social cleansing'. In some cases local neighbourhoods, and even families commit appalling acts of violence on other community members with lynching, contract revenge killings and family revenge massacres documented – though in some cases this is also associated with lack of trust in the judicial system. Organised crime has been exacerbated by civil conflict, with demobilised ex-combatants forming armed bands.

The proliferation of arms in post-conflict Central America with cross-regional traffic
This is closely associated with high levels of economic activities that include kidnapping, regional, international drug trafficking, contraband activities, armed robbery and other types of crime committed both by organised groups as well as by individuals.

Severe poverty, inequality and exclusion in the distribution of economic, political and social resources in countries across the region
Countries across the region are experiencing extremely high poverty levels (particularly in Nicaragua and Honduras), as well as severe inequalities in the distribution of economic, social and political assets and resources. Consequently, poverty and inequality overlap to generate conditions in which some people resort to crime and violence.

c) Costs and consequences of violence
Both levels and types of violence impact people's livelihood security and the functioning of local social institutions, as well as having negative effects on foreign investment once a country has a bad reputation for crime and violence. Consequently a framework that identifies the linkages between violence and the capital

assets and capabilities associated with livelihood security assists in identifying the costs of violence. Amongst the most important in the background paper were the following:

Violence has direct costs in terms of human capital assets
One of the most important direct costs of violence is increased private and public spending on health. In the case of domestic violence these include not only the health impact (specifically the increased demand for health care) buts also the loss of productivity and earnings. A study of domestic violence in Nicaragua details the incidence of health problems among victims of domestic abuse. Domestic violence against women also affects their children, whose health is at greater risk if their mother suffers domestic violence.

Violence and long-term conflict in the region has eroded social capital – the trust and cohesion in local neighbourhoods
In many contexts decades of armed conflict, followed by high levels of violence had resulted in a lack of trust in local organisations, and a decline in local membership organisations. The paper describes results from a Participatory Urban Appraisal in Guatemala that identified a paucity of cognitive social capital in local communities, with widespread complaints of lack of trust and unity, and an overwhelming '*cultura de silencio*' (culture of silence).

1.4 An Integrated Framework for Intervention: Linking violence reduction, citizen security and citizenship

The daily lives of the populations in all four countries in the Central American region are dominated to varying extents by complex, multiple forms of violence that can be categorised as political, social and economic in objective and nature. Table iii provided a roadmap of the types of violence and their associated manifestations, and illustrated how these can range along a continuum from institutional state violence at one end, through to gratuitous, routine daily violence at the other end. Obviously different types of violence also call for a range of interventions. At the same time these need to be undertaken in an interrelated manner.

An **Integrated Framework for Intervention** provides an essential planning tool. This allows practitioners to undertake the following:
• Effectively map existing interventions
• Identify critical gaps
• Prioritise limited resources in terms of filling essential gaps

Table iv provides a tabulated summary of such an Integral Framework for Intervention. It identifies four essential interrelated components that practitioners need to address:

i.   Identification of a comprehensive roadmap of the continuum of violence
Depending on the objective of the framework this can be undertaken at country, regional or city level. It is essential, however, to include all types of violence and, wherever possible highlight the interrelationships between them.

ii.   Distinction between violence reduction interventions that provide solutions to address three interrelated issues
• Reduce violence
• Improve citizen safety
• Increase citizenship

iii.   Identification of different levels of intervention
• State policies at the regional level
• National level policy such as laws and reform measures
• National level programs
• Local government level programs
• Civil society programs and projects

iv.   The design of measures with different time trajectories that distinguish between short term and medium / long term

The mapping of a violence intervention strategy will assist policymakers in a number of ways. These include the following:

- To identify the most appropriate balance of interventions in resource constraints contexts
- To demonstrate how short term high profile measures, such as against *maras*, need to be complemented by other longer term strategies
- To highlight less visible types of intra-household violence that need addressing
- To show that the most serious types of violence as manifest for instance by organised crime require structural /institutional reforms relating to the police force, justice system, penal system and impunity

Since violence is increasingly a very real threat to fragile democracies in Central America, all poverty reduction strategies in the region need to address the multitude of complex, violence related issues. At the same time, it is clear that preventative measures that deal with longer term social and economic issues, including inequality and exclusion, are as important as short term direct violence-control measures such as police or military interventions.

Table iv Integrated framework for violence reduction

Type of Violence		Types of solution					
		Reduction of violence		Improve citizen security		Increase citizenship	
	Level of Intervention	Short term	Med/ long term	Short term	Med/ long term	Short term	Med/ long term
Organised crime	*State policy at regional level*						
	State policy at national level						
	Central state programs						
	Local state program						
	Civil society programmes and projects						
Institutional violence by formal and informal institutions	*						
Gangs	*						
Delinquency/ Robbery	*						
Street Children	*						
Domestic violence	*						
Child abuse	*						
Inter-generational conflict	*						
Gratuitous random violence	*						

* = Similar range of interventions to those identified in the case of organised violence

2. Introduction

2.1 Report objectives

The objective of this study is to provide a conceptual framework, and associated overview, for understanding regional violence in Central America. This is intended to contribute to the development of an integrated approach to violence reduction interventions in the region. The study is the result of DFID's recognition in its Central American framework that violence is a regional priority, as well as DFID and Sida's agreement to form a collaborative partnership in this thematic area. Consequently the study aims to familiarise DFID and Sida staff, as well as others working in this area, with the complex multi-dimensional nature of violence. This will facilitate both agencies in their efforts to undertake the following tasks:

- Define a future over-arching framework when designing related programmes
- Mainstream such an understanding in all future development co-operation in Central America
- Inform key partners of the current dynamics of violence as well as potential approaches to violence reduction

A number of important issues have highlighted the need for a better understanding of contemporary violence in Central America. First, in DFID and Sida themselves there is a growing recognition of the important role that violence prevention and violence reduction measures can play in the lives of the poor. Second, different types of violence are perceived as seriously threatening stable growth and development in the region. This is of particular relevance given the fact that Peace Accords have recently been signed and democratic elections implemented in many of the region's countries – after up to 40 years of conflict. Third, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in Nicaragua and Honduras both identify violence as a crosscutting theme. In the case of Honduras, the PRSP prioritises violence prevention, and identifies as a sub-goal the design and implementation of strategies to reduce the causes of criminal behaviour.

2.2 Conceptual framework and background issues

Conceptual framework for understanding violence in Central America

To better understand the complexity of everyday violence in the lives of poor communities requires a holistic integrated approach that recognises the multifaceted interrelationships between different causes and consequences of violence. As shown in Table 1, the conceptual framework used in this study positions violence in terms of the complex interrelationships between the different categories, underlying causal factors, consequences and impacts of the phenomenon.[1]

Since the study seeks to address the issue of violence at the regional level, it is necessary to start with a contextual background. This highlights similarities and differences between the four countries covered in the review – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – and provides an important background to the four following sections of the study, identified in Table 1. Each section starts with a brief summary of conceptual definitions, by way of an introduction, followed by a more detailed description of relevant issues in the Central American context. Part five, while identified in the table, requires considerable further development and is therefore presented as a preliminary mapping in Annex 2.

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[1] This conceptual framework was originally developed in 1997-98 by Caroline Moser whilst Task Manager of the Urban Peace Program in Latin America at the World Bank. In the past three years the framework has been significantly modified, primarily as the result of two participatory studies of the perceptions of poor urban communities of violence. These were undertaken in Colombia and Guatemala by Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine with support from SIDA (see Moser, 2000; 2001; Moser and McIlwaine, 1999; 2000; 2001). Additional changes have been made as a result of recent consultative meetings in both Nicaragua and Honduras.

Table 1 Conceptual framework for understanding violence in Central America

Section	Components of framework	Examples of critical issues
1	*Characteristics of multiple complexity of everyday violence* ▪ Definitions ▪ Categories ▪ Measurements	▪ Perceptions of overwhelming nature of routinised violence in daily life ▪ Use of physical force causing hurt physical/psychological hurt ▪ Political / Institutional ▪ Economic ▪ Social ▪ Importance of both quantitative and qualitative data on violence
2	*Causal factors underpinning the multiplicity of violence* ▪ Historical context of political violence ▪ Causes of economic and social violence	▪ Importance of structure, identity and agency in terms of both perpetrators and victims of violence ▪ Influence over the past decades of structural political/institutional violence on everyday violence ▪ Proliferation of arms ▪ Regional migration ▪ Inequality and poverty
3	*Costs and consequences of violence*	Erosion or reconstitution of livelihood assets and associated capital ▪ Human ▪ Physical ▪ Financial ▪ Social ▪ Natural
4	*Operational Framework for interventions in the Central American Region* ▪ Current and emerging dominant violence reduction policy approaches	Holistic framework linking types of violence to different types and levels of intervention ▪ Criminal justice, transparency and the fight against corruption ▪ Public health ▪ Conflict transformation ▪ Human rights ▪ Social capital ▪ Citizen security ▪ Citizenship
5	*Ongoing violence related interventions* ▪ Key existing institutions ▪ Types of intervention	▪ International and regional level ▪ National level ▪ Local / municipal level ▪ Advocacy ▪ Research ▪ State programs ▪ Community projects

Contextual background on the Central American region: demographic, economic and poverty indicators

Since this is a comparative study, it is important to begin with a summary of some of the most important similarities and differences in the basic demographic characteristics of the four countries in the region. As Table 2 illustrates, in terms of land area, El Salvador is the outsider, with a size of around one fifth of each of the other three countries. Guatemala has both the largest population, and the largest city of all countries, yet has the lowest overall urban population. In contrast, Nicaragua has the smallest population, and lowest population density, but also the highest urban population.

The most rapid urbanisation is evident in Honduras, where the urban population increased from 32% to almost 52 per cent between 1975 and 1999. Although El Salvador is significantly smaller than the other

countries, it is densely populated, with a density per square km over seven times greater than Nicaragua. All four countries have distinctly young populations, with between 34 and 44% under 15 years of age. It is important to mention that the indigenous population of Guatemala is very high compared to its neighbours, constituting an estimated 60% of the population.

Table 2 Demographic indicators, 1999

Demographic indicators	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua
Land area (km²) *	20,720	108,889	112,492	121,428
Population total (million)	6.2	11.1	6.3	4.9
% Urban population				
1975	40.4	36.7	32.1	48.9
1999	46.3	39.4	51.6	55.8
Population density (per km²)	299	102	56	40
Population of largest city 1995*	415,000 (1992) (San Salvador)	1,731,970 (Guatemala City)	–	820,000 (Managua)
% Of population under 15	35.9	43.9	42.2	43.1
% Of population over 65	4.9	3.5	3.3	3.0
Annual population growth rate 1975–1999	1.7	2.5	3.0	2.8

Source: UNDP (2001) *EIU (2000a; 2000b)

Despite (limited) growth in the 1990s, economic performance in all countries continues to be relatively poor, with the highest GDP in all cases recorded over 20 years ago, as shown in Table 3. However GDP per capita varies considerably within countries. In Guatemala, for instance, the average in Guatemala City in 1996 was $12,668, but only $501.8 in San Marcos (UNDP, 1999a). Inflation is relatively high in all cases, but exceptional is Nicaragua, with an annual increase of 35% in the consumer price index between 1990 and 1999. Inflation has slowed significantly in El Salvador, with a percentage change of only 0.5 between 1998 and 1999 (UNDP, 2001). However, a drop in real wages across the region in recent years makes even the slightest increase in inflation problematic. In addition, the Gini Index shown in Table 3 reveals relatively high levels of inequality in all countries, but notable are Honduras, and especially Nicaragua which, according to these figures, has the highest level of income and consumption inequality in Latin America.

Table 3 Economic indicators

Economic indicators	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua
GDP per capita (US$)	4,344	3,674	2,340	2,279
GDP per capita annual growth rate 1990–1999	2.8	1.5	0.3	0.4
Highest GDP p.c. 1975–1999	4,846 (1978)	3,798 (1980)	2,558 (1979)	5,165 (1977)
Annual consumer price index % change 1990–1999	9.4	10.7	19.5	35.1
Gini Index[2]	50.8	55.8	59.0	60.3

Source: UNDP (2001)

Of all Latin American countries, the four Central American countries reveal consistently low human development and gender-related development indices and high human poverty indices (UNDP, 2001). Indeed, all four have the lowest human poverty ranking in Latin America, excluding Haiti. Despite severe

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[2] The Gini Index measures inequality over the distribution of income or consumption. A value of 0 represents perfect equality, and a value of 100 perfect inequality (UNDP, 2001)

limitations in comparisons between country level 'poverty lines', Table 4 shows that in all but El Salvador, over 50% of the population lives in poverty. In Guatemala the correlation between poverty and ethnicity is of particular importance. According to one report, the predominantly Mayan departments of El Quiché and Huehuetenango in north west Guatemala have poverty rates of 92% and 90% respectively (SCD, 2001).

Table 4 Poverty indicators[3]

Poverty indicators	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua
HDI rank 2001	95	108	107	106
HPI rank 2001 (Developing countries)	32	41	35	39
GDI rank 2001	87	98	96	95
% Population below national income poverty line 1984–1999	48.3	57.9	53.0	50.3
Life expectancy at birth 1995–2000	69.1	64.0	65.6	67.7
Infant mortality rate: per 1000 live births	35	45	33	38
Undernourished people: % of total population 1996/1998	11	24	22	31
Adult literacy rate: % age 15 and above	78.3	68.2	74.0	68.1
Adult literacy: female rate as % of male rate	93	80	100	105
Youth literacy % aged 15–24	88	78.9	82.9	73.4

Source: UNDP (2001)

Of the four countries, Guatemala is lowest on all UNDP rankings, and displays consistently poor poverty indicators including lowest life expectancy, highest infant mortality rate, and lowest female literacy rate (see Table 4). At the other end of the scale, El Salvador stands slightly apart from the others in all UNDP rankings. For instance, life expectancy rates differ by over 5 years between El Salvador and Guatemala. Particularly notable in Honduras and Nicaragua are the high rates of female literacy as percentage of male literacy, with 100 and 105% respectively. Also important is the difference between rural and urban literacy rates. In the metropolitan area of Guatemala, for example, female literacy is 84.8%, while in the (predominantly indigenous) north west, it is a shockingly low 37.1% (UNDP, 1999a).

While gradual improvements are occurring in educational levels in all countries, enrolment remains unacceptably low. In Guatemala, for instance, in 1998, 44.5% of young men and women between the ages of 15 and 24 had received either no schooling or less than 3 years primary education (UNDP, 1999a). It has been estimated that a household in Nicaragua has a 26% likelihood of being poor if the household head has completed secondary school, but a 56% chance if the head has not received any schooling (UNDP, 2000c). Another significant correlation is between infant mortality and maternal education; with the average infant mortality rate among mothers without education at 62, while among those with higher education the rate drops to 14 (UNDP, 2000c).

In summary, therefore, the region has severe socio-economic problems. Despite variations in national indicators, increasing urbanisation, high inflation rates and poverty combine to make life a constant struggle for the majority of people.

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[3] The Human Development Index (HDI) and Human Poverty Index (HPI) are both composite indicators developed by the UNDP. While the HDI measures average achievements in basic dimensions of human development the HPI measures deprivations in those dimensions. The Gender-related Development Indicator (GDI) is a composite indicator that measures gender inequalities in human development

3. Components of the Framework

3.1 Characteristics of the multiple complexity of everyday violence in the region

Violence permeates the daily reality of life in poor communities in the four countries with different types overlapping each other to form a complex, multiple layering of violent manifestations. In part this is the direct legacy of violently oppressive civil conflict. During the past decades political conflict submerged El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, leaving hundreds of thousands of civilians dead, and millions more internally and internationally displaced people. While Honduras did not suffer comparable levels of internal conflict during this period, moderate internal unrest was fuelled by the Honduran government's political allegiance with the US. Honduras was used as an arms-transhipment point, as a base and refuge for guerrillas, and also as a site from which direct military (counterinsurgency) action was taken during neighbouring conflicts, particularly that of Nicaragua. Such conflict and political violence peaked in the 1980s with the continued support from the US military for right-wing regimes fighting against a perceived 'communist' threat. Although the signing of peace throughout the region in the 1990s brought political violence to an official halt, the transition to actual peace in 'post-conflict' Central America remains elusive.

It is now widely maintained that political violence, rife during the conflicts, has been replaced by an upsurge in social and economic violence, which today is 'of a more social and multifaceted kind than the polarised and political violence characteristic of the 1980s' (Pearce, 1998: 589). The most visible manifestation of this new wave of violence is the actual, or perceived, rise in 'delinquency'. Writing in 1998, Cruz, for instance, stated that in El Salvador, 'the problem of delinquency is of such magnitude that Salvadorans have become more alarmed by criminal violence than what concerned them during the war…' (Cruz, 1998, cited in Arriagada and Godoy, 1999:16).

Closely associated with violence are fear and insecurity, which have long pervaded people's lives, particularly those that have experienced decades of political conflict. In many cases this may be exacerbated not only by the high visibility and reporting rates of particular types of violence, but also by the media that play a significant role in reflecting, shaping and even distorting public opinion (see Box 1). Since the resolution of political conflict, it is the *maras*, or gangs that have come to dominate public attention.

Box 1 Media representation of violence, danger and guns

Excerpt from editorial in El Salvador's *El Diario de Hoy* (1/07/99) (second largest circulation)
'People seek to protect themselves, in view of the lack of competence of the authorities to eradicate criminality, and the even lower capacity of the justice system to bring to trial, and punish, delinquents. […]There are vast numbers of El Salvadorans living in 'highly dangerous' areas, who, for work reasons, because they are afraid of various attacks of for pure fear, permanently need to go around armed .[…]

While the bandits have guns of war, grenades, or handmade pistols, to hand, since the element of surprise and treachery is in their favour, the worker, the finquero, the trader, the businessman has to defend himself with conventional arms. […] People do not have any other solution but to arm themselves.'

Source: Cruz and Beltrán (2000)

As Arriagada and Godoy observe, 'sensationalist treatment of violent and delinquent events can generate a climate of fear and a strong feeling of vulnerability in the population, which is not always real, or corresponding to the observed level of violence' (1999: 10). In the case of Honduras, for instance, data shows that less than 5% of crime is caused by youths under 18 years of age. Yet media representation of this phenomenon is so great that it even creates what is termed 'prefabricated violence'. The costs of media exaggeration are very high in terms of levels of fear and insecurity. This has important knock-on effects in terms of reduction in levels of mobility with less participation in community-level activities in local neighbourhoods, and in night school – affecting levels of social capital (*tejido social*) (See Sections 2.3 and 2.4).

To develop a regional strategy on violence reduction, it is necessary to start by ascertaining the scale of the problem as realistically as possible. This includes a brief introduction to different definitions, measurements and categorisations of violence. Of particularly importance is the identification of less visible forms of social violence, especially gendered and intra-family violence.

Definitions of violence[4]

Despite a lack of overall agreement as to what constitutes violence, most generic definitions identify it as the use of physical force, which causes hurt to others in order to impose ones' wishes (Keane, 1996). This refers to the 'unwanted physical interference by groups and/or individuals with the bodies of others' (*ibid*: 67). Broader definitions extend beyond physical violence to refer to psychological hurt, material deprivation and symbolic disadvantage (Galtung 1985; 1991; 1996; Schröder and Schmidt, 2001). Underlying these definitions is the recognition that violence involves the exercise of power that is invariably used to legitimate the use of force for specific gains.

Definitions of violence often overlap with those of conflict and crime, reflected in terms such as 'violent crime', 'criminal conflict', 'conflictual violence' and 'violent conflict'. However, there are important distinctions among them.[5] While violence and conflict are both concerned with power, conflict-based power struggles do not necessarily inflict physical or mental harm on others, while violence by its very nature does. Conflict therefore can be peacefully resolved through negotiation without recourse to force but becomes violent/armed conflict when it includes fighting and killing. Alternatively, crime by definition is an act (usually a grave offence) punishable by law, i.e. the breach of a legal prohibition. In turn, violent crime has been defined as any act that causes a physical or psychological wound or damage and which is against the law (Vanderschueren, 1996: 96).

Measurements of violence

The measurement of violence is limited by a number of important constraints. These are relevant globally as well as in Central America itself. The first constraint concerns the use of mortality statistics as proxies for levels of violence. Such statistics are notoriously unreliable due to underreporting, difficulties in interpretation and lack of reliability of data (Short 1997: 14). National and regional differences in data collection methods, recall periods, and cultural definitions of crime and violence make valid cross-country comparisons very hard to achieve.[6] In addition to victimisation surveys, other commonly used data sources include official crime statistics (usually obtained from police figures), murder or intentional injury statistics from hospitals and morticians including death certificates, and judicial records such as offender rates and surveys (Arriagada and Godoy, 2000; Glaeser and Sacerdote, 1999). Diverse sources within the same city or country often record markedly different rates of homicide, even though this indicator remains more reliable than other violence indicators. Above all such quantitative methodologies fail to capture how people actually experience the multiplicity of different forms of violence on a daily basis. Qualitative sociological and anthropological studies play an important role in complementing quantitative research. Participatory appraisal techniques, for instance, are a new methodology that gives voice and agency to people's perceptions of violence (Moser and Holland, 1997; Moser and McIlwaine, 1999).

In Central America despite the extensive nature of the violence, reliable comparable data is scarce, with measurements often varying according to sources. In addition, the nature of violence influences reporting rates. In the case of domestic and sexual violence, for a number of reasons, only a fraction of victims report their experiences. Furthermore, it is possible that an inefficient police and judicial system may discourage people from reporting crime. Overall reported figures are a conservative estimate of actual violence levels.

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[4] The discussion of definitions in this section draws heavily on Moser and McIlwaine (2002).

[5] As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, for instance, '*Violence* is (i) the quality of being violent; violent conduct or treatment, outrage, crying; (ii) by law, violence is the unlawful use of physical force; or intimidation by the use of this'. In contrast, '*conflict* is (i) a state of opposition or hostilities; fight or struggle; the clashing of opposed principles; (ii) the opposition of incompatible wishes or needs in a person; an instance of this or the distress resulting from this'.

[6] Ultimately these are only possible through specific global data sets such as the International Crime Victimization Survey (Alvazzi del Frate, 1998; Zvekic and Alvazzi del Frate, 1995) and the United Nations World Crime Surveys (Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza, 1998).

Where available, survey data may at times offer a better approximation of actual violence levels. One of the first challenges facing the region, therefore is the development of more robust and reliable data sources.

Within these data limitations, in Central America as elsewhere, the most commonly used indicator of violent crime is the homicide rate. The global average is a rate of 5 per 100,000 with a rate over 10 generally considered dangerously high. However, in Central America in 1998 the average homicide rate in all of the four countries was over 10 times the global rate, as illustrated in Chart 1. This clearly indicates the phenomenal levels of violence in the region. In 1996, El Salvador topped some of the global murder ranking statistics with a rate of 139 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (Call, 2000).

However, to use these figures as a definitive indicator of national violence levels would be misleading. Not only do they disregard non-fatal violence, such as much intra-family violence (and within this non-physical violence), but also the term generally includes both intentional *and* unintentional violent deaths. The latter rather curiously includes car accidents.[7] In addition, there are differences between non-violent, and violent, crime and violence. Violent crime accounted for almost half of all reported crime in Nicaragua in 1995 (Rodgers, 1999), while in Guatemala, violent crime increased from 7,638 cases in 1997 to 9,375 cases in 1999 (Rodríguez and de León, 2000). In Nicaragua, crimes against life almost tripled from 9,392 in 1997 to 25,804 in 1998 (Call, 2000).

Homicide rates show important variations based on variables such as age and gender. Data generally support the commonly held belief that young men are most likely to be the victims of homicide. In Guatemala, for example, it is estimated that the male homicide rate in 1996 was 98.94, while the female rate only 17.66. Furthermore, men between the ages of 20 and 29 accounted for 29% of all violent deaths between 1991 and 1996, and in 49% of cases, the cause of death was a firearm (CIEN, n.d.). Similarly, 1996 data from El Salvador found a young man to be ten times more likely to be murdered than a young woman (Cruz and Beltrán, 2000).

Geography can be another important variable in homicide rates. Between January and April 2000 in El Salvador, there were 419 homicides recorded in rural areas, compared to only 291 in urban areas. The use of firearms in intentional killings is overwhelming in both rural and urban areas (Cruz and Beltrán, 2000). According to IDB data, cited in Rodríguez and de León (2000), the homicide rate of 101.5 in Guatemala City is, after Cali and Medellín, the third highest for any city in the Americas. However, other departments show still greater rates, the highest being a staggering 165 in Escuintla.[8] In contrast, violence in Honduras is predominantly an urban phenomenon, with the highest homicide rates in the city of San Pedro Sula.

Finally ethnicity as a variable must be included in an analysis of the Central American region. In Guatemala, for instance, departments experiencing higher homicide rates are those which have on average higher literacy levels, fewer households in extreme poverty, and where a higher proportion of the population is ladino, rather than indigenous. Those departments with lower homicide rates of around 33, are more likely to be rural, have a high proportion of indigenous population, literacy levels are lower, and household poverty more extreme (CIEN, nd). This suggests that the association between violence and poverty must be made with caution (see below). The ethnic dimension of the Guatemalan case is also illustrated by UNDP data (see Chart 3).

Since a large number of violent crimes, especially less serious ones, in all likelihood go unreported, victimisation surveys provide a useful comparative tool. Unfortunately, there is a lack of such data at the regional level. However, two useful surveys exist which include some of the countries under study. The first is the Latinobarometer, a public opinion survey of 17 Latin American countries, conducted annually since 1995. Although not specifically a victimisation survey, it contains some relevant information. However, the survey is restricted to urban populations, and individuals from higher socio-economic groups have been over-represented in all years (Gaviria and Pagés, 1999).

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[7] As noted above, this may cause problems in terms of data comparison. In Honduras, for example, the number of homicides registered in San Pedro Sula in 2000 ranged from police reports of 423, to a total of 1,093 according to Forensics reports (Cordi, 2001).

[8] Others include Izabal (127), Jutiapa (114) and Santa Rosa (111) (*ibid.*).

Table 5 provides data from the latinobarometer on the urban victims of robbery and assault. This shows that in all Central American countries, the victimisation rate for the crime identified is considerably higher than the Latin American average – and in the case of Guatemala it is almost double.

Table 5 Family member victim of robbery or assault in the last 12 months

City	Percentage of population
Guatemala	54.9
El Salvador	47.1
Honduras	36.3
Nicaragua	35.7
Latin America Average	30

Source: Londoño and Guerrero (1999)

A more representative survey (although still only urban) is the 1996 ACTIVA study, carried out by PAHO in eight cities of Latin America and Spain. While San Salvador and San José are the only Central American cities represented, the data nevertheless provides a useful indicator of urban violence levels.

Table 6, which shows data from San Salvador, supports other data sources showing that men are more likely to be the victims of violence than women, with young men more at risk than older men. Victimisation according to educational level was not found to be significant. Since the data is classified according to severity, it is not possible to determine the categories of violence to which it refers. Additional data from the survey suggests unusually high intrafamily victimisation rates for men, although overall the rate for women is higher. But, as always with intrafamily violence, reporting rates are likely to be low.[9]

Table 6 Victimisation level according to demographic variables, San Salvador

Demographic Variables	Level of victimisation			
	None	Slight[1]	Moderate[2]	Intense[3]
All	59.1	22.4	12.8	5.6
Sex				
Male	57.1	21.0	15.9	6.0
Female	60.6	23.5	10.5	5.3
Age				
18–25	51.5	24.6	16.7	7.2
26–40	57.1	24	12	6.9
41–55	64.1	20.2	12.5	3.2
≥56	72.1	16.7	8.5	2.7

[1] People who have been victim of an act of slight violence, such as being threatened or assaulted for money.

[2] People who have suffered various violent acts, such as an assault or beating.

[3] People who have suffered violent attacks on more than one occasion, including some very serious such as injury by light weapon or firearm.

Source: Cruz (1999)

Latinobarometer data on the relationship between city size and crime rates show that city growth rate is a stronger indicator of crime rates than city size. Households in cities experiencing high population growth are more likely to be victimised than are those living in cities with more stable populations. The tentative reason suggested for this is the self-perpetuating relationship between rising crime rates, and increasingly overloaded and ineffective institutions, due to population growth (Gaviria and Pagés, 1999). Table 2, which identifies country level comparative data on population density, provides regional level evidence to support this conclusion.

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[9] Reported victimisation is as follows: Been shouted at: men 47.2%, women 48.3%; hit or slapped: men 4.6%, women 7.8%; hit with an object: men 2.5%, women 3.9% (PAHO, 1999).

Categories of violence

While comparative statistical data on violence in Central America may be limited, in some countries in the region, particularly El Salvador and Guatemala an extensive literature exists on different manifestations, perceptions and preoccupations relating to the issue. These range from country level studies and city level profiles, to local community ethnographies.

Consequently, one of the biggest challenges may well be the development of a more methodical approach to organizing such information rather than the identification of even more studies. This is particularly important, given the limitations of homicide statistics and the richness and importance of more qualitative data for furthering our understanding. To develop violence prevention and reduction policies it is necessary for the multiple manifestations of violence to be systematically categorised into manageable groupings or types at the same time as avoiding oversimplifications. This study provides a preliminary effort at such a requirement.

i.   A framework for categorizing violence[10]

Drawing on the work of Latin American violence experts in particular, the study framework uses an overarching typology that distinguishes between political/institutional, economic and social violence. Each type of violence is identified in terms of the physical act that consciously or unconsciously is used to gain or maintain power, and is based on the primary motivation behind the violence identified. Within this it is possible to place other types of violence as they are also experienced, whether by nature, victim or perpetrator.

Table 7 summarizes some of the common types of violence for each category, in terms that are deliberately broad. Thus social violence (mainly interpersonal) is motivated by the will to get or keep social power and control.

Table 7 Categories of violence

Category	*Definition*	*Manifestation*
Political/ Institutional	The commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power.	Guerrilla conflict; paramilitary conflict; political assassinations; armed conflict between political parties; violence perpetrated by state 'political institutions' such as the army and police
Economic	The commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, for economic gain or to obtain or maintain economic power.	Street crime; carjacking; robbery/theft; drug trafficking; kidnapping; assaults including killing and rape made during economic crimes.
Social	The commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, for social gain or to obtain or maintain social power.	Interpersonal violence such as spouse and child abuse; sexual assault of women and children; arguments that get out of control.
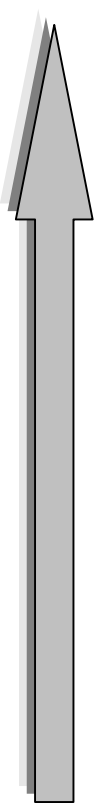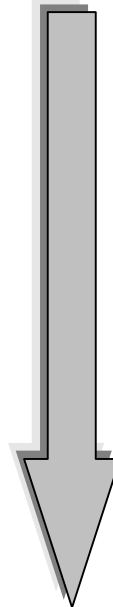
Source: Moser (2000: 36)

Much social violence is gender-based both inside and outside the home, including domestic violence and child abuse, often linked with constructions of masculinities (Grieg, 2000). It can also refer to ethnic violence, arguments among peers or territorial or identity-based violence associated with gangs. Economic violence, motivated by material gain, refers to street crime such as mugging, robbery, drug-related violence and kidnapping. Finally, political/institutional violence is inspired by the will to win or hold political power. In war or conflict contexts this may include the violence associated with guerrilla or paramilitary groups

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[10] This section draws heavily on Moser (2000) and Moser and McIlwaine (2002).

while in post-conflict more peaceful contexts it refers to the institutional violence perpetrated by politically controlled state institutions such as the police and army.

Table 8 Roadmap of types of violence in Central America

Primary direction of violence continuum	Category of violence	Types of violence by perpetrators and/or victims	Manifestations	Secondary direction of violence continuum
	Political / institutional	Institutional violence of the state and other 'informal' institutions Including the private sector	Extra-judicial killings by police State or community directed social cleansing of gangs, and street children Lynching	*State institutional violence resulting in lack of trust in police and judiciary system*
	Institutional / economic	Organised crime Business interests	Intimidation and violence as means of resolving economic disputes Kidnapping Armed Robbery Drug trafficking Car and other contraband activities Small arms dealing Trafficking in prostitutes and USA headed immigrants	
	Economic / social	Gangs (Maras)	Collective 'turf' violence; robbery, theft	
	Economic	Delinquency / robbery	Street theft; robbery	
	Economic/ social	Street children (boys and girls)	Petty theft	
Intra-household social violence results in youths leaving the home and at risk to variety of street violence	Social	Domestic violence between adults	Physical or psychological male–female abuse	
	Social	Child abuse : boys and girls	Physical and sexual abuse particularly prevalent in the case of step-fathers but also uncles,	
	Social	Inter-generational conflict between parent and children (both young and adults, particularly older people)	Physical and psychological abuse	
	Social	Gratuitous/routine daily violence	Lack of citizenship in areas such as traffic, road rage, bar fights and street confrontations	

Since any categorization is by its very nature static, this three-fold typology is conceptualised as a continuum with important reinforcing linkages between different types of violence. Social, economic and political/ institutional violence are overlapping and interrelated. Individuals, households and communities experience different types of violence simultaneously. Equally, from the perspective of the social actors themselves these categories are not mutually exclusive in terms of violent acts committed. The same act can be committed for different reasons based on diverse, multiple identities. Consequently, the interrelationships in this threefold categorisation are complex, context specific and multi-directional along such a continuum.

This three-fold categorization provides a useful framework for the identification of the specific manifestations of everyday violence in the Central American region, which are summarized in Table 8.

ii.   Visibility and associated public awareness

At the outset it is also important to recognise that different categories of violence vary in terms of their visibility. This affects their profile both in terms of public awareness and also in terms of associated fear and insecurity. In a region where the multiple complexity of everyday violence dominates people's everyday lives, such variations also differ between countries in the Central American region, shaping levels of tolerance as to what are acceptable level of violent behaviour.

In a post-conflict context the activities of both delinquents and gangs are highly visible. Consequently their associated profile is very high, with tremendous pressure to develop and introduce interventions to reduce the economic and social violence associated with them. In contrast, intra-household social violence is much less visible. Thus it has a far lower profile in terms of public opinion. This includes gender-based domestic violence, the abuse of children and inter-generation conflict. Such violence is widespread, regardless of income level, and is largely treated as a private family matter. Finally, the outcome, if not the act of organised crime, is often visible – for instance in terms of levels of conspicuous consumption. However the extreme danger associated with this level of economic violence results in extreme reluctance to address it.

iii.   The legacy of regional political conflict on everyday violence

Since the legacy of political violence and conflict of the past decades still dominates political, economic and social life, it is also important to identify the impact of this legacy on current patterns of violence. Of particular importance are a number of implications of protracted political conflicts.

First, the inheritance of a culture of violence means that 'the system of norms, values or attitudes [exists], which allow, make possible, or even stimulate the use of violence to resolve any conflict or relation with another person' (Cruz, 1998: 92). The normalisation of violence resulting from prolonged exposure to dehumanising violent political conflict may pervade behaviour in all spheres of life.

Second, where citizens have been subject to violent state oppression, present trust of the state as an institution is likely to be low. Such trust may be further eroded by a weak and corrupt post-conflict state, where the powerful remain shielded by impunity. Especially pertinent is a perceived lack of police and judicial effectiveness. This not only makes the control of violence problematic, but also may directly cause violence in the form of community and individual vigilantism. So a high crime rate may, in part, be both a cause and an effect of inefficient policing. Related to perceptions of the legal system are perceptions of the law itself. It is telling that in El Salvador a reported 40% of adults believe it is best to ignore a law if you do not agree with it (Cruz, 1998).

Violence also operates as a vicious cycle that feeds off itself. Thus an increase in violent crime lowers inhibitions about violent conflict, both via demonstration (criminals provide an example to those inclined to emulate their behaviour), and via the erosion of social norms that regulate interpersonal relations (Fajnzylber *et al*, 1997, cited in Buvinić *et al*, 1999; see below on costs). Finally, a very real remnant of armed conflict is the wealth of high calibre weapons now in general circulation. This has contributed to what Koonings and Kruijt (1999: 15) call the 'mass production and consumption' of violence (see below).

iv.   Political/institutional violence in the post-conflict context

Despite the post-conflict context in Central America, it cannot be assumed that political violence has been eradicated. Recent human rights reports do suggest that governments generally respect the rights of their citizens, and that the violations that remain have reduced significantly in recent years. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Table 9, extra-judicial killings by police officers remain a problem. In particular, allegations of

'social cleansing' are common, especially in Honduras and Guatemala where the state is still the main perpetrator.

Table 9 State violence in 1996: main categories by percentage of total cases

Guatemala 191 cases	Extrajudicial killing 51%	Death threats 16%
El Salvador 2,726 cases	Against personal integrity 34%	Judicial process 26%
Honduras 321 cases	Executions 34%	Arbitrary detention 38%
Nicaragua 164 cases	Against individual freedom 24%	Physical integrity 23%

Source: Saldomando (1998: 79)

The victims of such operations are generally street children, and suspected gang members or habitual criminals.

- In *Guatemala,* a number of corpses were found in and around Guatemala City in early 2000, showing signs of torture and violent death, including decapitation. Nearly all of the corpses were young males, many with gang style tattoos, leading some observers to suspect the government of a social cleansing operation (USDS, 2001b). However, such allegations are difficult to prove, and it is easy for the accused to pass off such deaths as the result of inter-gang rivalry or drug trafficking
- In *Honduras*, an NGO reported the 'social cleansing' of 302 street children and youths between January 1998 and May 2000. Of these deaths, they attribute 36 % to the police and members of the military (USDS, 2001c)
- In *San Salvador*, a reported 63% of adults approved or justified social cleansing in some way (Londoño and Guerrero, 1999; for further details see Section 2.3 on gangs)

In addition, despite the supposed reduction of domestic military activity with the advent of democracy in Central America, high levels of delinquent crime have prompted governments throughout the region to enlist military assistance in an attempt to (be seen to) increase security. Governments often see violence as a challenge to, or test of, their authority (Salomando, 1998). In this respect an intermittent military presence on the streets in recent years has been a useful political tool to demonstrate a 'heavy-hand' against crime (see below on attitudes to crime and violence).

In contexts where police presence is lamentably low or inefficient, the wealthy sectors can afford private security. However this is itself can also cause further crime, when it is linked to robbery and organised crime and operates without control mechanisms. At the same time, the inhabitants of poor marginal areas who lack such resources often consider that they have no option but to resort to rudimentary vigilance in the face of increasing economic and violence (Arrigada and Godoy, 1999). As a consequence a number of non-state 'informal' institutions associated with local neighbourhoods, and even families commit appalling acts of violence on local community members. Within the region informal justice sought outside the justice system is most commonly known as lynching.

a) Lynching
Within the region lynching is linked both to political/institutional violence and to economic violence and has been identified as more common in Guatemala and Honduras, rather than in Nicaragua or El Salvador. In **Guatemala**, retribution against perpetrators of crime and delinquent acts has resulted in an alarming rate of lynching undertaken by groups in local neighbourhoods. According to MINUGUA statistics, between 1997 and 2001 there were over 350 incidents of lynching, or attempted lynching (Prensa Libre, 18/03/01). The majority of the victims were suspected of property-related crimes, or of being members of criminal gangs. Of the 75 cases that went to trial, 17 sentences were handed down, of which ten were guilty verdicts. By the end of 2000, only one individual had actually begun to serve a prison sentence (USDS, 2001b).

Lynching is attributed to the perceived incompetence of the official judicial system and police force to bring criminals to justice, as well as to such factors as a lack of education and knowledge of the law and legal systems (Prensa Libre, 28/10/00). Of particular importance are different perceptions of crime. For the police

or judiciary, theft may be a relatively insignificant crime. However, for households in extreme poverty it can have serious consequences (UNDP, 1998).

In **Guatemala** lynching is also undertaken as a manifestation of vengeance. This has been identified as a 'left-over' of methods used legitimately by the Civil Self-Defence Patrols (Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil, PACs) during the 1980s. The first recorded case of a group lynching was recorded in 1982, undertaken by a 'public court' of the PAC (El Periodico, 23/10/00). MINUGUA noted that although the number of lynching has begun to decrease, they have become increasingly premeditated and planned (USDS, 2001b).

b) Revenge killing

Revenge killing is another type of informal institutional/political violence that is difficult to track. However, in **Honduras**, for instance, contract killings have been recorded. In 2000 several 'murders for hire' were documented, usually relating to land disputes or 'criminal activities' (USDS 2001c). In **El Salvador**, there has been a documented rise in the number of family massacres attributed, in a large part, to revenge for grievances during the war (see Box 2). Family massacres increased during the 1990s; between 1995–1996, there were 25 registered incidents (90% of which were in rural areas), claiming 102 lives. Only 19% of the cases recorded between 1991 and 1997 were connected with robbery. In essence this is a form of '*bandolerismo rural*' (rural banditry) in which wars among rural families rely on remnants of militarism that have survived in rural areas. Such killings began before the signing of the peace accords, with the killing of 15 members of the same family in Ayutuxtepeque in 1991. '*Matanza familiar*' as it is commonly known, is a chilling remnant of rural conflict in El Salvador.

Box 2 Characteristics of family massacres in El Salvador

Family massacres have a number of common characteristics that include the following:

- They are carried out by combatants, trained to kill
- In many cases the victims are ex-combatants and the motives strongly personal – taking justice into their own hands for past grievances
- They rely on the incapacity of security bodies and the state to guarantee social order, as well as a lack of trust in the capabilities of security and judicial institutions to solve problems
- They legitimise the use of violence in conflict resolution

Source: Bejar (1998)

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v.   Economic violence

Economic violence, as defined in Table 7, refers to the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire for economic gain to obtain or maintain economic power. In the post-conflict context in Central America the term *mara* (literally band or gang) has become a catchall term to describe an extensive diversity of male street violence. If successful policy interventions are to be developed, however, it is critical to accurately disaggregate between organised crime, *maras* as a socio-economic phenomenon involved in both social and economic violence, and the economic violence associates with delinquency (*delincuencia*), robbery (*robos*) and loitering (*vagancia*). The fact that much of the current literature fails to do this makes this particularly challenging. Consequently this section provides a preliminary description of the predominant types of economic violence. Given the critical importance of the *mara* phenomenon, this merits a section in itself, and is discussed in Section 2.3 below.

a) Organised crime

The incidence of much economic violence is, in part, directly attributable to the civil conflict. In many cases, demobilised ex-combatants have formed armed bands, which have been identified as the principle cause of armed crime across the region (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999).

- In **Guatemala** it is estimated that some 600 gangs of organised crime exist. These comprise 20,000 members with the majority headed by ex-army officials (*ibid.*). The most common types of crime attributed to organised criminal gangs are kidnapping, armed robbery (especially banks), drug trafficking, trafficking in prostitutes, and arms dealing
- In **Nicaragua**, armed bands made up of former contras continue to engage in kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery in the north and north-central regions of the country (USDS, 2001d). Geographically,

organised crime proliferates in border areas, particularly crime concerned with trafficking (Castellanos, 2000 on Honduras)

b) Kidnapping

This is one of the most important activities undertaken by organised criminals. Although victims initially were restricted to higher socio-economic groups, in recent years this phenomenon has become more generalised, affecting different regions and sectors of the population (UNDP, 1998). However, generally it still remains more prevalent among higher income sectors. In **Guatemala**, the number of people kidnapped dropped from 92 in 1997 to 30 in 1998 (UNDP, 1999b), and there has been an increase in overall number of sentences for kidnapping (UNDP, 1998). Nevertheless, at least 5 'important families' (comprising about 40 people)**,** all victims of kidnapping or extortion**,** have decided to emigrate, because of insufficient government protection (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999).

It is not just organised gangs who are responsible for kidnapping. In **El Salvador**, the presidential commission investigating police misconduct identified at least 12 officers suspected of involvement in kidnappings during 2000 and previous years (USDS, 2001a). Police corruption of this nature is common throughout the region.

c) Regional and international drug trafficking

This is another phenomenon closely associated with organised crime. Central America's location between South and North America makes the region prone to international trafficking. Much of the region is also involved in the production and trafficking of drugs (see Aguilera and Ogaldes, 1996 on Guatemala). In Nicaragua, the occurrence of drug trafficking crimes increased from a rate of 6.41 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1990 to 23.75 in 1999 (UNDP, 2000e). In 1995 in Guatemala, cocaine to the value of Q98 million (approximately £9 million) was seized. In 1998, this figure reached Q921 million (UNDP 1999b). International and regional trafficking in prostitution is also a problem throughout the region. Particularly important in terms of violence is the trafficking in children. According to Guatemalan authorities, street children from El Salvador are lured to border areas with Guatemala where they are then forced into prostitution by organised rings. In addition, children from Honduras have been used as beggars to support traffickers in San Salvador (USDS, 2001a).

d) Robbery and delinquency

Armed robbery is committed both by organised groups as well as by individual delinquents and robbers. In the participatory urban appraisal undertaken in Guatemala for instance, focus groups most commonly identified delinquents as boys and young men who had dropped out of school, and hung around on street corners. Out of boredom, forced idleness and a frequent consumption of less serious drugs, such as marijuana, they were often involved in petty crimes such as stealing handbags, or from shops. Robbers, in contrast, were more likely to be older in age, more serious criminals, and far more violent in nature and often associated with assault (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001: 106).

While delinquency was the outcome of a lack of adequate parental care, robbery was closely associated with lack of employment. In some areas this was closely linked to the annual agricultural cycle. Scarcity of work when the harvest (*zafra*) was completed, meant that men were so desperate that they robbed and kidnapped. Changes in levels of robbery were also closely linked to changes in the police force and here differences were noted across communities depending on whether or not the new *Policía Nacional Civil* (National Civilian Police Force) had been introduced.

As with the *maras*, the presence of a large number of robbers and delinquents increased levels of fear and reduced mobility particularly at night. Figure 1, the causal flow diagram drawn by a group of ladino women In Villa Real, highlights the fear felt, while also identifying the consequences for the robbers themselves. These were identified not only as prison, but also people taking the law into their own hands and killing robbers (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001: 106–112).

Figure 1 The causes and effects of robbers in Villa Real, Esquipulas, drawn by a Ladino Woman (aged 26)
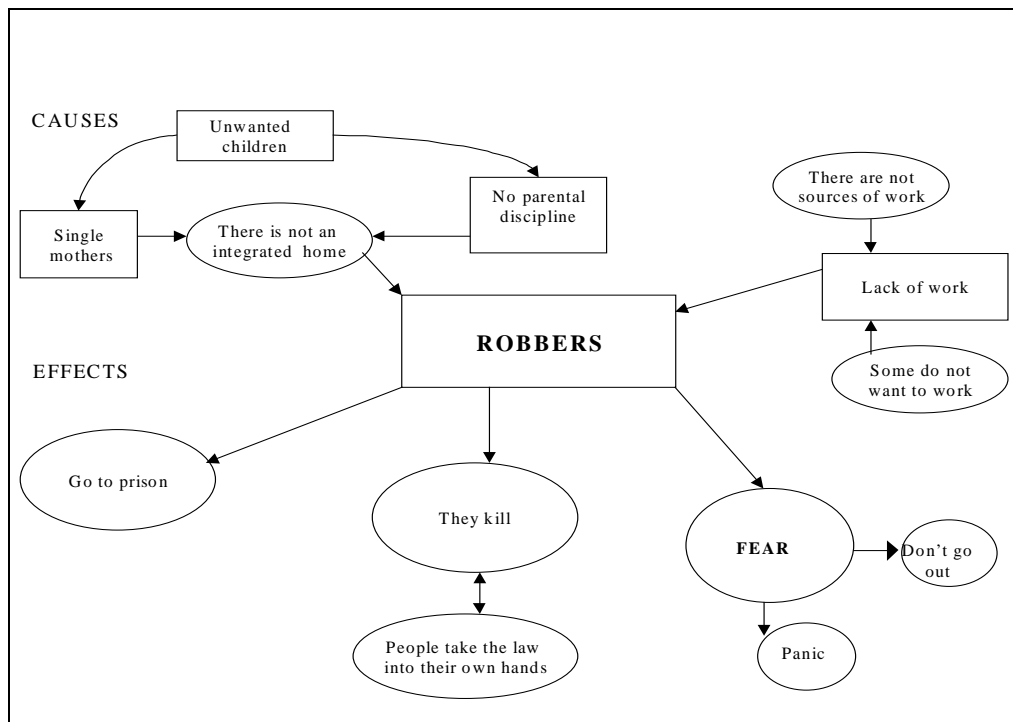
Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2001)

Across the region robbery has increased dramatically:

- In Guatemala during 1999, 57 banks were robbed, an average of more than one a week (Rodríguez and de León, 2000). All types of robbery increased between 1996 and 1998 except assaults of tourists and buses (see Chart 4)
- In Nicaragua violent theft increased from a rate of 25 in 1990 to 71.8 in 1999, and theft using force increased from 188 in 1990 to 212.46 in 1999 (UNDP, 2000e)

vi.   Social violence

As defined in Table 7, social violence refers to the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire for social gain to obtain or maintain social power. Not only is social violence serious in nature; in addition, a shocking multiplicity of types of violence dominate the daily lives of people in the region.

a) Domestic violence

'The most widespread type of violence is that which occurs within families and intimate relationships…where girls and women are affected disproportionately' (UN, 1989, cited in McAlister, 1998:6). Since reporting rates for domestic violence are notoriously low, survey data is a much more reliable source of comparative data than actual reported incidents. Yet even reported abuse is often alarmingly high. The Public Ministry of Honduras reported investigating 10,535 cases of spousal abuse during 1999, of which women filed 9,268. This is an average of 25 per day. Furthermore, police reports from 1996 in Comayagua, Honduras, show that 16% of all reported crimes were related to violence against women (Spindel *et al*, 2000).[11]

Table 10 contains domestic violence survey reports for all four countries. This shows that between 40 and 52% of women report ever having been abused by a partner in surveys conducted in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Although generally considered a non-fatal phenomenon, violence within the home can be

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[11] Any increases in reported levels may also be misleading, however, as this is often due to institutional advocacy and awareness raising.

deadly. In 1993, a PAHO study found that between 45 and 60% of homicides against women were carried out inside the home, the majority by partners (UNDP, 1999c).

Table 10 Domestic violence in Central America

Location of survey	Survey year	Sample	Violence reported
El Salvador[1]	1997	714 women	11.7% reported being hit by their partner in the last year
Guatemala: Sacatepequez[2]	1990	1000 women	49% had been victims of mistreatment. In 74% of cases the aggressor was the partner
Honduras[3]	1996	n/a	4 in 10 women reported being physically abused by their partner at least once
Nicaragua: León[4]	1995	488 women: 18% rural, 82% urban	52% of ever-married women reported having experienced spousal violence

[1] PAHO (1999) [2] Cited by Rico (1996) [3] Spindel *et al* (2000) [4] Ellsberg (1997a)

Not only are reported rates for domestic violence very low; in addition across the region important differences can be noted between levels of visibility and associated levels of tolerance. In Nicaragua, for instance, domestic violence has a very high profile, which may in part be linked to extensive Nordic donor-funded research on the issue as much as to disproportionately high levels of domestic violence. The prevalence of child violence and sexual abuse also receives widespread media coverage. In contrast, in Honduras both these types of social violence are much less visible, have been the focus of far less research, and are essentially considered as issues that relate to the private as against public domain.

For these reasons, two recent studies of intra-family domestic violence recently conducted in Nicaragua may have wider importance across the region. These provide a comprehensive picture of the characteristics of violence experienced in the home and highlight the extensive nature and gravity of the problem[12] (see Box 3).

One critical gender based violence debate concerns the disputed effect of transforming gender roles on levels of domestic violence. Bejar (1998), for instance, argues that intrafamily violence of the last two decades may be attributed to the new economic and political role adopted by many women. This has transformed traditional female behaviour, such that it is now in 'conflict with traditional patriarchal culture at all levels of society' (*ibid*.: 103).

However, to attribute domestic violence in general to such a recent phenomenon may be a mistake. Contrary evidence shows that the transformation of gender roles is more likely to *reduce* domestic violence, or certainly lessen its acceptability. Research on *maquiladora* workers in Honduras, for instance, shows that female employees more often report an improvement in their relationship with their spouse/ parents since starting work (38.1%) rather than a deterioration (5.8%). 56% report that their relationships stayed the same (Ver Beek, 2001).

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[12] A 1993 sample survey of 488 women in León (Ellsberg, 1997a), and a 1998 nationwide survey of over 11,500 women (INEC/MINSA, 1998).

Box 3 Characteristics and nature of intra-family violence in Nicaragua

Characteristics

- Types of violence reported most often were pushing, punches and kicks, followed by slaps and thrown objects
- The median duration of abuse was 5 years, but among women aged 35–49, this increased to 10 years
- In the national survey 77% of women reported suffering more than one type of violence, while 32% suffered 5 or more
- 20% of women reported having been obligated to have sex when they did not want to by use of physical force. Of these, 24% reported that their partner tried to strangle or burn them on purpose
- 31% of abused women reported being beaten during pregnancy, half of which reported receiving blows to the stomach. (INEC/MINSA, 1998)
- 54% of abused women indicated that their husbands were generally intoxicated during violence, and nearly one third of women cited alcoholism as the major cause of violence
- Generally, abuse appears to begin shortly after marriage, with 50% beginning within the first two years, and 80% within four years (Ellsberg, 1997a)
- Of the 4.1% of women in the national survey who reported being sexually abused under the age of 12, 53% of their abusers were from within the family, with a further 26% known to the victim. In half the cases, abuse had begun before the age of 10 (INEC/MINSA, 1998)

Background factors:

- Wife abuse was significantly associated with being poor (Ellsberg, 1997a), with having 4 or more children, and to some extent living in an urban area (Ellsberg, 1997a; INEC/MINSA, 1998)
- The nationwide survey found a generally inverse relationship between domestic violence and educational level (INEC/MINSA, 1998)
- The surveys show that in 50 to 60% of cases, their children were witnesses to the violence with significant repercussions. Children of an abused mother are twice as likely to suffer from emotional, learning or behavioural problems, and seven times more likely to be abused themselves (Ellsberg, 1997a)

Seeking help

- Although 74% of women suffering from domestic abuse told others of their situation, most commonly their relatives, only 25% of urban women, and 13% of rural women, sought help from an institution (INEC/MINSA, 1998)

Although resources and services for women and children who suffer from domestic violence have increased significantly over recent years, evidence from Nicaragua, for instance, suggests a shortage of institutional support for abused women, particularly in rural areas. At the same time, as Box 4 shows, although the majority of women surveyed did not condone domestic violence, there remained a significant proportion that did so.

Box 4 Women's attitudes towards domestic violence, Nicaragua

A 1998 national survey of over 11,500 women between the ages of 15 and 49, found that 27.7% of urban women, and 40.1% of rural women (giving a national average of one in three), believe that certain circumstances justified a husband using physical violence against his wife. The most commonly endorsed reasons were:

- If he suspects she is seeing someone else (25.6% of total)
- If she fails to take good care of the house or the children (18.6% of total)
- If she goes out without telling him (15.3% of total).

Source: INEC/MINSA (1998)

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b) Rape

Of all the types of sexual violence against women, rape is perhaps most hidden. Levels of reported rape vary from just 277 in El Salvador, to 1,181 in Nicaragua (USDS, 2001a; 2001d), although it is unlikely that in reality such a vast disparity exists. The UNDP recorded a rate of 109.7 rapes per 100,000 women over the age of 15 in Nicaragua in 1994 (UNDP, 2000d). When this conservative rate is compared with, say, the homicide rate of the same year, 13.6, the difference is staggering.

In much of Latin America, rape traditionally was viewed as a crime against the honour, honesty, or modesty of women, (rather than a crime against their sexual freedom and personal integrity). As such it was, and sometimes still is the case that the rapist is cleared if he agrees to marry the victim, thus restoring the 'honour' of the woman and her family (Rico, 1996). However, USDS reports suggest that of the countries under study only Guatemala retain this law. In recent years, awareness of the problem of gender violence and its dynamics is growing, and an increasing number of women are being offered the means to claim their right to a life without violence. There is a clear link between HIV transmission and acts of sexual violence, rape in particular. The most affected by this cycle of violence are women sex workers (Mehrotra, n.d.).

c) Violence against children
Like domestic abuse against women, violence against children in the home is often an invisible yet serious and widespread phenomenon.

- In **El Salvador**, according to the Ombudsman for the Protection of Human Rights, over 85% of all child abuse occurs in school and at home, with only a small percentage of cases reported to the authorities (USDS, 2000a). The ACTIVA survey of San Salvador shows that 37.5% of women admit to hitting their child(ren), while men report slightly less at 25.7 of the total sample (Orpinas, 1999). This illustrates that the right of the child to grow up in a non-violent environment is often considered second to the right of parents to discipline their children

- In **Nicaragua** between January and August 2000, victims of rape included 222 children under the age of 13, and 351 between the ages of 13 and 17, with sexual abuse overwhelmingly affecting girls

- In **Guatemala** it is estimated that girls account for 94% of sexual abuse victims, while boys are more commonly the victims of mistreatment and abandonment (UNDP, 1998)

- In **Honduras** abuse both by police and the general public against an estimated 10,000 street children is a serious problem. Many street children have been sexually molested, and approximately 40% regularly engage in prostitution. This sexual (economic and social) violence against street children is reflected in the incidence of HIV: 30% of street children in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, Honduras, are reported to be HIV-positive (USDS, 2000c).

The Participatory Urban Appraisal of violence in Guatemala revealed that fear of sexual abuse was widespread among children, even when they had not actually experienced such abuse. Children's drawings of their sources of fear highlighted this as a critical preoccupation particularly among young girls (see Figure 2) (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001: 59)

Figure 2 Drawing of sexual violence against children in the home drawn by a 13 year-old girl from El Carmen, Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa

(Translation: I'm afraid that when I'm sleeping I could be raped, that's what I'm afraid of)

d) Gratuitous violence[13]
A diversity of forms of random, gratuitous social violence pervade the daily lives of local populations that can be associated with a lack of, or limited conception of, citizenship. Such acts of violence as road rage, and other traffic-related violence, as well as bar brawls and other forms of aggressive street behaviour are often

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[13] The Oxford University Dictionary defines 'gratuitous' as uncalled for, unjustifiable, acting without reason or justification'. Building on this definition, gratuitous violence is defined as random, arbitrary daily violence resulting from the use of violence to resolve petty forms of conflict or argument

not identified as violence as such. They may be closely linked to the normalisation of violence resulting from prolonged exposure to dehumanising political conflict. The result is a tendency to use violence to resolve any form of conflict with another person.

There may well be significant difference across countries. In Nicaragua the social revolution experienced during the 1980's Sandanista period may well have left a far stronger concept of citizenship than is the case in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala that were exposed to decades of violently oppressive civil conflict. To date such violence remains largely unrecognised and unstudied. A systematic examination of this particular phenomenon and its relationship to issues of citizenship can be identified as an important future research agenda.

3.2 Causal factors underlying the multiplicity of violence

The previous section highlighted the scale both of economic and social violence in Central America. In addition it illustrated the manner in which political violence has persisted in a post-conflict context. Not only does this show the gravity of the situation but also the complex, overlapping manner in which different types of violence are interrelated. A lack of consensus as to the most appropriate analytical approach to understand the causes of violence means that frequently this depends not only on the type of violence, but also the discipline within which it is being interpreted (Moser, 2000).

To understand causal factors underlying violence requires a holistic approach, rather than one which focuses on one specific level, or type, of violence. One of the best-known approaches grappling with the interrelated nature of violence is the 'ecological model'. This seeks to demonstrate that no single level or cause determines or explains violence. Each level or cause, when combined with one or more additional causal variables, may yield a situation where violence occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).[14] The 'ecological model' identifies violence at structural, institutional, interpersonal and individual levels (Moser, 2000; 2001).

In the case of Central America, Arriagada and Godoy (1999) suggest a multi-causal epidemiological approach that identifies three types of contributory factors. First is social and familial position and situation, in terms of gender, age, education, socialisation, and alcohol and drug consumption. Second are social, economic and cultural factors such as unemployment, poverty, overcrowding, social inequality (which threatens social integration and leads to exclusion), violence in the media and the culture of violence. Third are institutional and contextual factors such as war, drug trafficking, corruption, availability of firearms, festivals etc.

Moser and McIlwaine (2002) in their research on community perceptions of urban violence in poor communities in Guatemala and Colombia recognize that the situation-specific nature of people's experience of violence needs to be located within a broader structural context. To embrace this they develop a holistic framework that identifies the factors underlying violence, fear and insecurity in terms of the three interrelated concepts of structure, identity and agency.[15]

Since issues of power and powerlessness are fundamental to understanding the causal factors that underpin violence, at the outset it is critical to analyze the wider political and socio-economic power structure within which local and individual realities are manifest. It is also important to recognize that people experience violence in different ways not only because of a diversity of underlying structures of power, control and domination, but also because of differences in their identity positioning. Basic elements in individual identity formation and primary signifiers of relationships of power include gender, age, ethnicity and race. Young men are the main victims and perpetrators of crime and violence, although this varies according to the types of violence involved. The construction of identities of masculinities, for instance, is closely linked with the exercise of male power over women, and manifest in violence against them (Greig, 2000).

In addition, individuals and social groups often have 'multiple identities' that most frequently cut across race and ethnicity. In the case of Central American countries they may include indigenous, Afro-Caribbean or Amerindian identities. Generation and age, as social categories, interact with both gender and ethnic identities with implications in terms of violence. The elderly and the young are particularly vulnerable to violence in ways that differ from the general adult population. Finally, for any given individual, there may be a plurality of identities. Thus a guerrilla involved in political violence and armed conflict in a struggle against oppression may at the same time be physically abusing his wife.

Since each participant or witness to violence brings his or her own perspective, identity is closely interrelated with individual 'human agency'. This relates to recognition of individuals as social actors who face

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[14] First used to explain human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), the 'ecological model' has been used by violence researchers to elucidate the complex causes of sexual coercion, child abuse (Belsky, 1980) and domestic violence (Heise, 1998). The ecological model is a multilevel framework that incorporates both individual-level factors – biophysical, psychological, and social – and external factors that act upon the individual.

[15] This section draws heavily on Moser and McIlwaine (2002).

alternative ways of formulating their objectives, however restricted their resources.[16] For instance, although in many contexts young men as a category are at 'risk' of experiencing violence, not all young men are involved in violence. Equally, a constant universal interpretation of agency across cultures cannot be assumed. Place and location are both important in determining how identity and agency are differently constituted, affecting how actors attempt to cope with situations they face.

Structural factors underlying violence in Central America

In the case of Central America the multidimensional, endemic and interrelated nature of violence in the region means no single causal factor predominates. Nevertheless, from both the literature review and the field visit to Nicaragua and Honduras, three factors stand out as particularly pertinent, each of which is briefly elaborated below
i.   The legacy of political violence and conflict in the region
ii.   The proliferation of arms in post-conflict Central America with cross-regional traffic
iii.   Severe poverty, inequality and exclusion in the distribution of economic, political and social resources in countries across the region

i.   The legacy of political violence and conflict in the region

Recent political conflicts have had a profound affect on the politics, economy, and society of 'post-conflict' Central America. This has lead 'many academics to think that criminality is a continuation of civil war, or rather, is the now distorted effect of the social causes which provoked the war' (Saldomando, 1998: 82). Although a detailed analysis of the complex antecedents to political violence is beyond the scope of this study, it is nevertheless salient to briefly highlight three of the main structural factors underlying such violence in the region.[17]

First, analysts argue that violence is not new but is deeply embedded in the historical evolution of Latin American societies. Unlike other regions, where violence has erupted between states (Western Europe), or due to the collapse of the state (recently parts of Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia), in Latin America the nature of the state itself is violent. A 'culture' of violence and related fear persist, with learned norms offering no passive alternatives to the violent resolution of conflict (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999).

A second structural source of conflict in Central America relates to the agrarian system inherited from Spanish colonisation (Kay, 2000). Inequitable land distribution has been one of the most overt manifestations of grossly unequal distribution of resources, with most land in the hands of the dominant elite. Peasants seeking livelihood rights, principally through land reform, have often experienced military oppression, when they have attempted to challenge dominant power relations. Consequently rural areas have generally suffered the worst oppression. Ruthless military counter-insurgency campaigns have been intended to ensure that local villages or communities were not harbouring guerrilla 'sympathisers'.

A third underlying factor has been external (particularly US) involvement in Central America since the mid-19th century, which has had a significant impact on national political and economic structures. In particular, the onset of the post-World War II Cold War transformed US interest in the region from primarily economic, to predominantly political in nature. This was reinforced in 1959 when Castro overthrew the Batista regime in Cuba. With the end of the Cold War, US interests in Central America have been transformed once more, this time promoting peaceful (rather than military) solutions to conflicts, and encouraging the establishment of consolidated democratic regimes.

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[16] As Long clarifies ' the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion' (Long 1992: 23).
[17] See for Booth and Walker (1999) for a more detailed discussion of the political history of Central America. Koonings and Kruijt (1999) provide an analysis of the evolution of a culture of violence in Latin America.

ii.   The proliferation of arms in post-conflict Central America

A second causal factor underlying violence, also closely linked to a post-conflict context is the availability of firearms. An increasingly widespread acceptance of the use of violence as a means of control is closely associated with arms possession. In San Salvador, for instance, a survey by ACTIVA showed that 49% of adults participating were in favour of their neighbours arming themselves to combat delinquency (Cruz and Beltrán, 2000). In addition, the armed conflicts in Central America have fuelled a thriving black market in high calibre military weapons. Across the region the number of weapons collected and destroyed after the signing of peace has been minimal. At the same time the steep increase in the number of private security firms has also increased the number of guns in circulation. Such firms increase the likelihood that disputes will end fatally, rather than deterring violent crime (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999). A diversity of statistics shows the extent to which the proliferation of arms is a serious structural causal factor underlying both social and economic violence (see Box 5).

Box 5 Statistical information identifying the proliferation of arms in post-conflict Central America

El Salvador
- Estimates for current civilian circulation of firearms range from 250,000 to 400,000 (Cruz and Beltrán, 2000)
- 7% of people surveyed in the metropolitan area of San Salvador reported owning a firearm. Projecting this onto the whole urban population, suggests some 25,000 people admit to being armed (Cruz, 1998)
- In 1998, 6 out of every 10 violent deaths in the department of San Salvador were the result of firearms or explosives, and in 1999, an average of 5 people a day died as the result of homicide by a firearm nationwide (Cruz and Beltrán, 2000), which is equivalent to a homicide rate of approximately 30 per 100,000 inhabitants
- In 1993, it was found that at least one member of 30% of families in urban El Salvador has been the victim of an armed assault (Cruz, 1999)
- A 1999 survey in the metropolitan area of San Salvador, showed 7% of school children between 13 and 19 admitted having taken a firearm to school (*ibid.*)
- A law introduced in 1999 meant that any citizen could obtain a semi-automatic weapon with enough power to kill a two tonne animal (*ibid.*)
- 30% of respondents in the ACTIVA survey of San Salvador had seen someone robbed with a weapon (Londoño and Guerrero, 1999)

Guatemala
- Some 2 million arms are estimated to be in the hands of 36% of the civilian population (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999)
- In addition to weapons left by the conflict, organised criminal gangs, often related to drug trafficking, are reputed to import large quantities of arms (Rodríguez and de León, 2000)
- Around 200 private security companies employ around 35,000 private agents, more than the manpower of either the army or police force (Rodríguez and de León, 2000)
- An important ethnic dimension to intentional deaths by firearms is illustrated by the low rates associated with areas of high indigenous populations, and high rates (ten times more than the lowest rate) in areas that are predominantly ladino (UNDP, 1999b)

Honduras
- 68% of deaths and injuries resulting from violent crime using weapons, were due to firearms (Castellanos, 2000)
- In border areas in the early 1990s, an AK-47 could be bought for approximately $20 US (*ibid.*)
- National congress estimates that between 400,000 and 500,000 illegal weapons are in circulation nationwide (*ibid.*)

Nicaragua
- It is estimated that during the 1980s, some 2 million military weapons were in circulation, consisting mainly of AK-47s and M16 guns, pistols and hand grenades (Lira, 2000)

iii. Poverty and inequality

Another important debate concerns the extent to which crime and violence are causally rooted in poverty or inequality. While poverty has long been considered the predominant determinant of violence, more recently this linear relationship has been challenged as too simplistic.[18] Interpretations based on statistical modelling, for instance, have demonstrated that inequality is more influential than poverty in relation to national level data on murder rates (Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza, 1998).[19] Some analysts also argue that increased levels of violence are also closely related to the interrelated processes of globalisation, structural adjustment as well as political democratisation, which have occurred in many countries across the region.

At the same time the daily living conditions of the urban poor heighten the potential for the emergence of conflict, crime or violence (Vanderschueren, 1996). In reality, poverty and inequality frequently overlap to generate conditions in which some people resort to crime and violence. As outlined in the background section of this report, there are severe inequalities in the distribution of economic, political and social resources in countries across the region. In the participatory appraisal of violence undertaken in Guatemala, for instance, focus groups gave greatest priority or weighting to the nexus linking poverty, unemployment and lack of adequate education, as shown in Figure 3, a causal impact diagram drawn by a group of young men in Guatemala City. Here poverty was perceived as a direct consequence of lack of education and employment, along with other factors.

Figure 3 Causal impact diagram of poverty in Guatemala City, drawn by a group of six young men in a local community
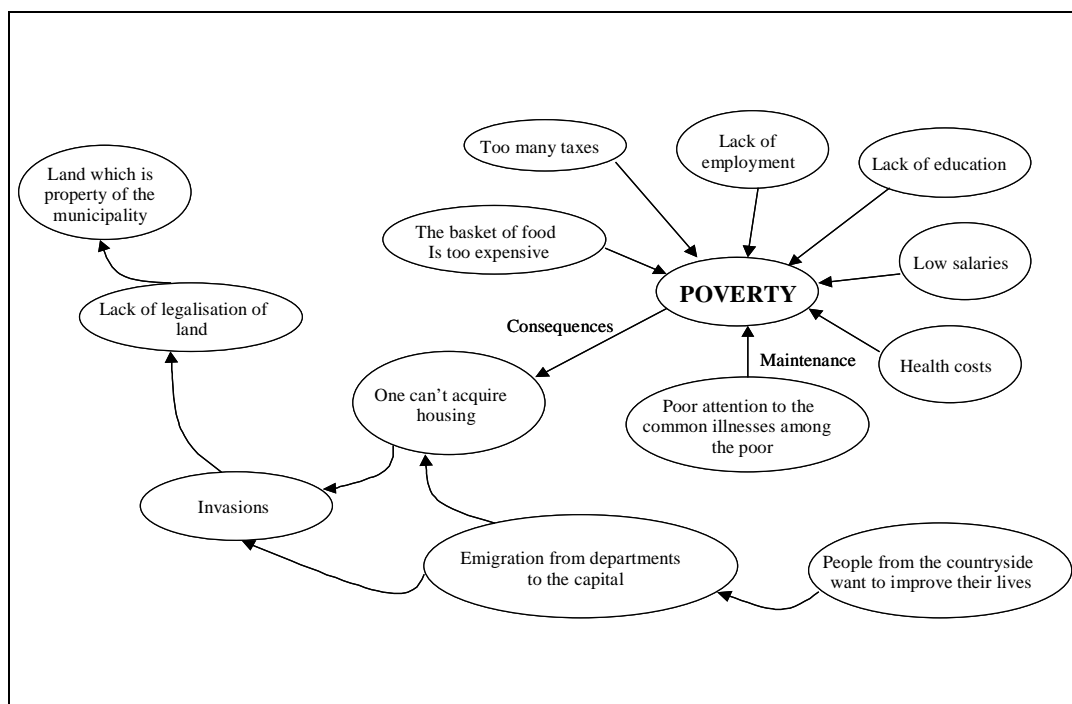
Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2001)

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[18] For instance, to assume a positive relationship between poverty and violence, also assume that all poor people are potentially violent. In turn, this incorrectly assumes that the worst levels of crime and violence are during economic crises (Arriagada and Godoy, 2000: 114).

[19] A recent global study showed income inequality to be an important determinant of national homicide rates, after controlling for the distribution of education, poverty, ethnic and economic polarization, security services and social capital (*ibid.*). In turn, the effect of income inequality on criminal activities depends on socio-economic status, with the poor being more responsive than the rich (Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza, 1998: 8).

Additional underlying causes and consequences of violence in the Central American region

In addition a number of other important factors as either causes or consequences of violence can be identified. Some of these are discussed in greater detail in other sections of the document, while others are flagged here as issues for further consideration. These include:

- Migration, both within the region and between the region and the US – with links to **mara**s – and to a lesser extent Colombia (see next section)
- Inadequate and/or corrupt policing, judicial system and penal system
- Post Hurricane Mitch situation, leading to drastic relocation of large populations increasing unemployment and also breaking down social capital (*tejido* social)
- Post September 11th, linked to US policy, legitimisation of new levels of institutional violence and greater readiness of armed forces/police to act with impunity against civilians
- Organised crime syndicates, mobile and active across the Central American region, with links outside associated with drugs, illegal trading of cars and organised trading of sexual services, mainly involving women and children (see previous section)
- Organised youth gangs ('*maras'*), across Central American borders and also links with US gangs (see next section)
- Drug distribution relating to Central America's geographical locations as the mid-point between Colombian based production and Mexican distribution links to the USA

3.3 Agency, Identity and Youth Violence: the Gang Phenomenon

Since it is the ubiquitous gang culture that is the most visible, often the most brutal, but least understood, manifestation of post-conflict violence in Central America, it is important to provide a separate section on this phenomenon. Gangs, or **maras** as they are commonly called, epitomise the causes of much contemporary violence in Central America, and reflect the particular frustrations of youth identity.

Since their emergence as a highly visible phenomenon in the 1980s, the number of young people involved in gangs has steadily increased. Consequently, despite a lack of reliable data as to the proportion of crime actually attributable to youth gangs, they have become a primary focus of public attention. As previously mentioned, sensational media coverage has heightened this concern, often serving to obscure far more insidious violence such as that associated with organised crime. For these reasons it may be useful to 'deconstruct' some of the myths about the *maras* that currently prevail across the Central American region.

Myth One: All gangs have the same objectives

As terms in common usage, juvenile delinquents and '*maras*' have become synonymous, especially in the media. Therefore, it is important to start by identifying fundamental differences in terminology, as identified by young people themselves both in El Salvador (Smutt and Miranda, 1998) and in Guatemala (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001). Although there is little difference between the meaning of the traditional word for gang, '*pandilla*', and the slang, '*mara*', there is a significant difference between a gang that is considered a '*mara*,' and one that is a '*banda*' (band). As a generalisation it may be useful to define them as follows:

- *Bandas* are gangs specifically structured around criminal (economic) violence and may be closely linked to organised crime
- *Maras* range from normal groups of friends to *bandas,* in terms of their level of criminality

Although most gangs engage in some degree of illicit behaviour, the level of crime varies significantly between these two types. If it is assumed that all *maras* are delinquent *bandas*, or vice versa, then all youth involved will be stigmatised as delinquents, regardless of the relative level of criminal behaviour or violence, as illustrated in Box 6. Since the motivation for joining a gang varies according to the activity in which the gang engages, policy interventions aimed at reducing gang activity must take into account this critical difference. Currently this is not always the case. In Honduras, for instance, the recently installed President 'militarised' poor communities as a means of cracking down on heightened levels of *mara* activity, which has perhaps exacerbated or transformed the different forms 'social cleansing' which have long been present in Honduras. As a consequence for some time, young men – whether or not they have perpetrated crimes – have been vulnerable to shooting (particularly if displaying a tattoo), as well as to imprisonment and beating.

Box 6 Attitude to gangs in Guatemala City

'We asked the members of a radio patrol, going around our neighbourhood at around 2 in the morning, what should we do if we catch a young gang member *in fraganti*? The police replied 'you know what you must do…to hand them over to us or the army is a mistake…you know what to do…Kill them!'

Source: PRODEN, (1996: 145)

Myth Two: All youth are intrinsically violent

Although '*maras*' are responsible for a range of social and economic violence it is important to remember that not *all* young people are intrinsically violent. Consequently:

- Not all gang activity is violent or illicit
- Not all delinquents are gang members
- Not all young people are either (or both)

Although the latter seems particularly obvious, the pervasive nature of gang culture means that often young people in general are seen as dangerous or untrustworthy. For example, in the El Salvador ACTIVA survey:

- 27% of adults agreed that police could detain youth due to their physical appearance (Londoño and Guerrero, 1999), perhaps connected to the finding that 26% saw the high number of youth gangs as the most serious problem in El Salvador (IUDOP 1999)

Myth Three: There are just three or four dominant gang groups in each country

Although the widely known *mara* groups, the '18' and 'Salvatrucha' (or MS 13) operate throughout the region, in most marginal urban neighbourhoods where gangs generally operate there are usually also a number of smaller territorial gangs which may or may not be affiliated with a larger gang (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Diagram of collaboration among *mara* groups in a marginal urban community of Guatemala City, drawn by three young gang members aged 18–20
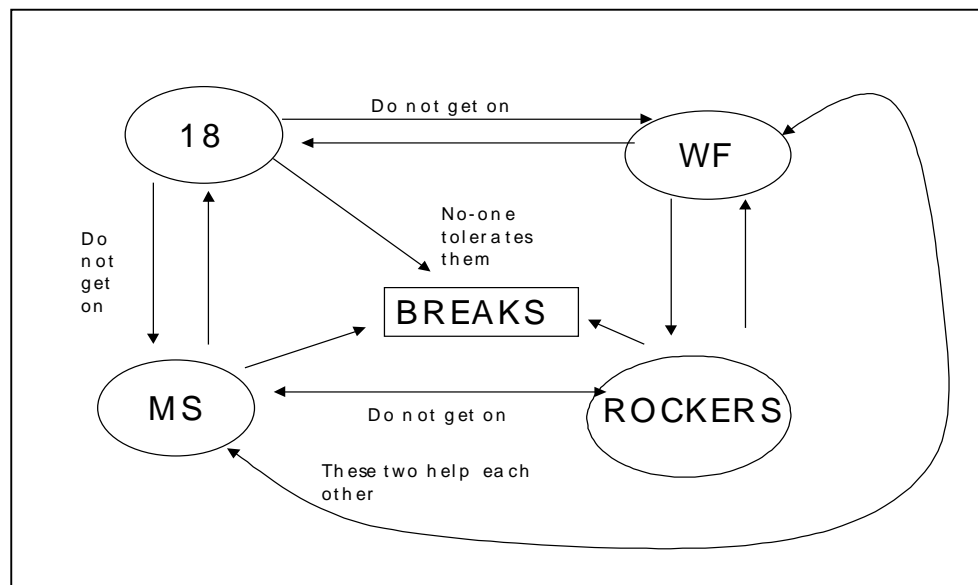
Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2001: 96)

- In **Guatemala City** in 1997 the *Prensa Libre* (cited in UNDP, 1998) identified a total of 53 different *maras* operating in 12 different zones, although this is a conservative figure. A different source put the figure for Guatemala City at 330 in 1995 (PRODEN, 1996). While gang activity is most prolific in marginal urban areas in Guatemala, gangs also operate in 10 departments outside the capital (Rodríguez and de León, 2000)
- In **Honduras** a nation-wide register lists 340 gangs, with a membership level of 14,696 young people between the ages of 11 and 30. However those working with juvenile offenders in Honduras estimate this is nearer the figure of 60,000 (Castellanos, 2000). A third recent estimate puts the figure at 40,000 across the country.
- In **El Salvador** two types of (often inter-related) youth gangs have been reported – territorial gangs and student gangs. While territorial gangs are concerned with the protection and domination of their territory, student gangs focus on rivalry between different educational institutions. Young people belonging to one type often will often belong to the other, and as such may have different rivals in school and in their local community neighbourhoods (Smutt and Miranda, 1998; FLACSO, n.d.). This has obvious implications in terms of the exacerbation of rivalry.

Myth Four: Gangs are exclusively a male phenomenon

Although gangs are overwhelmingly a male phenomenon this is not exclusively the case. Some Guatemalan *maras* have female leaders, and female only gangs exist in Nicaragua (Rodgers, 1999; see also Laidler and Hunt, 1997 on the US). Evidence from Guatemala shows that a girl, who is mistreated by her father, may be advised by her friends to leave home, and to join a *mara* to protect her from this mistreatment. As young

women have said, 'it is sometimes better to be with the *mara* than with the family' (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001: 98; see below).

However, female gang members may be little more than sexually exploited appendages to the gang (Rodgers, 1999):
- In **Guatemala** it was reported that the female members of some gangs had to agree to have sex with a number of the male gang members in order to remain a member (Winton, forthcoming)
- In **San Salvador**, whether coerced or not, relatively high levels of sexual activity within gangs are suggested by the finding that nearly 56% of female gang members surveyed had been pregnant at some time (Cruz, 1997)
- In **Honduras** research by women's NGOs has highlighted the sexual abuse by some gang members of local girls. Of particular concern are 'gang rapes' that occur as part of gang initiation

Myth Five: Gang violence is exclusively economic in nature

The fact that *maras* engage in economic violence is well known. Along with *bandas, maras* participate in economic violence such as pick pocketing, mugging, theft, and bus robberies. In Honduras, for instance, barrio taxation by maras is common. Kidnappings, bank robberies and roadblocks have also been attributed to youth gangs, although these are much less common and may be better identified as manifestations linked to organised crime (and the confusion in terminology needs to be borne in mind) (Choloros *et al*, 1997).

However some of the violence manifest by *maras* is social in nature, and in this case linked to issues of gang identity. Gang-associated social violence may take the form of territorial conflict (often resulting in deaths), rape or vandalism. This affects not only their own personal safety and mobility, but also that of other young people and the community as a whole (see Box 7).

Box 7 The impact of gang activity on community mobility in Guatemala City

'Just outside [my house] there are the boundaries of 2 gangs – the 18s and the 13s, and when they come out to fight they start to do it with machetes, and they throw stones at the houses, and so people have to stay where they are – I can hear it all from my house, when they start to fight, to kill' (17 year old young woman).

Source: Winton (forthcoming)

Gang rivalry is generally based on control of particular territory, but is sometimes seen as the protection of a neighbourhood. As a gang member from El Salvador commented, 'Those from the other *mara* are enemies, because they want to come here and rule, they want to order us around, to have the *colonia*…We fight for power and territory. They want to come here and rob…What we do is look after the *colonia*' (Smutt and Miranda, 1998: 138). This vision of gangs as 'guardians' of the community also occurs in **Nicaragua,** where protection by the local *mara* in return for some underreporting of their activity to the police, often makes them a useful security institution within the community (Rodgers, 1999). However, when a number of gangs proliferate in a small area, the rivalry is unlikely to be mutually beneficial if the territory is not rigidly definable.

Violence between *maras* ranges from fist fights, to the use of knives, guns and even grenades, with the current proliferation of arms in Central America (mentioned above) particularly evident among *maras*:
- In El Salvador *maras* reportedly have major military weapons in their possession, including M-16s, AK-47s, M-3 hand grenades and RPG-2 rocket launchers (Choloros *et al*, 1997)
- The most common cause of death among 15–24 year old Guatemalans in 1997 (30.5%) was firearms (Poitevín *et al*, 2001)

The increasing use of firearms in territorial fighting also heightens the risk of death and injury to non-gang members if, as happens, they are caught in the crossfire. Whatever the benefits of being part of a *mara* (see below), the dangers they face are extreme.
- In **Nicaragua** it is estimated that between 3 and 5% of gang members are killed each year (Rodgers, 1999)

- In **El Salvador** out of 20 gang members interviewed, 12 reported their most painful memory to be the murder or injury of a member of their *mara* (Smutt and Miranda, 1998). (See Chart 5 for further information in the violence experienced by gang members).

The majority of gangs have some kind of initiation process, usually involving a potential member committing some kind of violent act, although the nature and level of violence varies between gangs and countries. In addition it is often very difficult to leave a gang prematurely once you are a member. Many of those attempting to leave face greater personal risk of violence, or may have to commit an extreme act of violence to be permitted to leave. However it is important not to generalise at the regional level. In some contexts gang membership is more a 'rite de passage' for young men who leave once they calm themselves, ('calmarse') and settle down. This is often associated with cohabiting with a partner and starting a family. Equally religious belief can provide an important motivation for leaving the *maras.*

Myth Six: Gangs are major distributors of drugs

Although drugs such as marijuana and cocaine (and, less commonly, heroin) are often associated with *maras*, it is generally in terms of consumption rather than distribution. This may affect individual acts of violence, particularly petty robbery associated with drug habits, but generally does not affect the extent to which gangs are violent (Rodgers, 1999). Nevertheless the attraction of 'easy money' means that in some contexts gang members are highly vulnerable to becoming associated with more organised drug distribution crime.

Myth Seven: Youth gangs are caused by violent motives

It is now widely acknowledged that young people do not join gangs entirely due to violent aspirations, but rather in response to a multiplicity of social, economic and cultural factors. These culminate in their seeking in a gang what they do not find elsewhere. The most frequently cited cause of the exponential growth of *mara* activity in Central America is the deportation of young Salvadorans from the US, some of whom have brought back influences of gang culture from the US. The two main gangs in Central America (predominantly El Salvador) are part of the two main Los Angeles gangs and use the same names. In addition, migration within Central America has also been significant in contributing to the regional dissemination of gang culture.

At the same time, there are important causal factors of exclusion within poor marginal urban areas where gangs tend to proliferate. Figure 5 shows some of the perceptions as to why youth in Guatemala city join gangs and illustrates some of the issues of exclusion which include lack of education, employment and understanding from their family. Figure 6 provides additional perceptions of causes and consequences of joining gangs, in this case noting the differences between boys and girls.

Figure 5 Perceived causes of *maras*, drawn by 3 young men and women in Guatemala City, aged 20–23
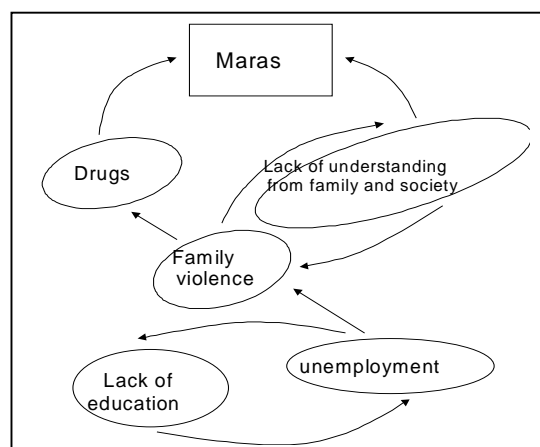
Source: Winton (Forthcoming)

Precarious living conditions, tensions provoked by an accumulation of shortages, excessive working hours of parents, the increased material and emotional responsibility of women, severe overcrowding, the lack of recreational space, and the lack of basic services all serve to weaken the socialisation function of the family (FLACSO, n.d.). Indeed, a commonly cited reason for joining gangs is to find what is not available at home, namely understanding, communication and respect (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001). In terms of the continuation of violence, it is important to note the connection between (social) violence in the home and (violence of) gangs.

Figure 6 Causes and effects of being a male and female gang member in El Merced, Guatemala City, drawn by Ladino girl (Aged 16)
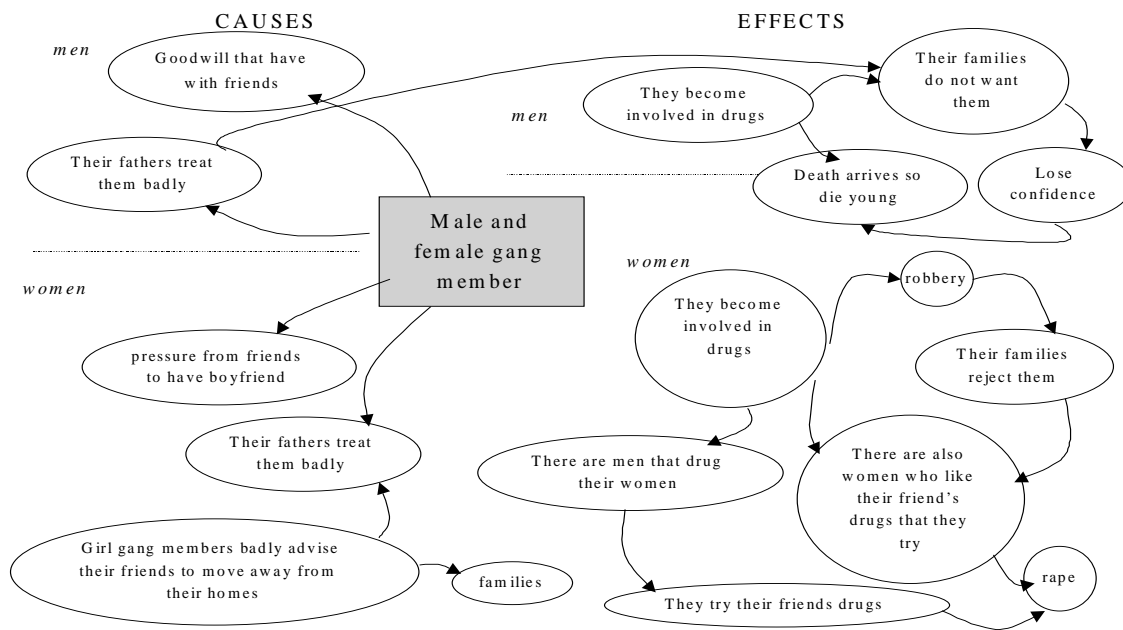
Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2001)

Furthermore, the fact that many young people in Central America are subject to a lack of employment opportunities, together with (and connected to) generally poor levels of education, means that they often suffer high levels of economic exclusion. In El Salvador it was found that, in 1997, 31% of 10 to 24 year olds did not work or study. These young people are thought to be at heightened social risk (FLACSO, n.d.). Indeed, of over 1,000 gang members surveyed in San Salvador, 76% were not studying, and 74.5% did not have a job (Cruz, 1997).

- In **El Salvador**, the commonest reason for joining gangs as reported by members was '*vacil*' (46%), a word used to refer to a range of issues including companionship as well as specific gang activities. A second reason was family problems (22%). Nearly 85% of respondents would like to 'calm down' their life in the gang, namely give up drugs and violence, and when asked which elements of the gang they would like to maintain the most common answer was friendship (24%), followed by unity and solidarity (21%) (Cruz, 1997)
- In **Guatemala** a 1987 study identified that only 8 of 290 gang members questioned wanted to 'leave the *maras* and become good citizens' (AVANCSO, 1996: 18). This indicated that the concept of citizenship held little positive meaning for the socially, politically and economically excluded and that the prospect of being a good citizen was unlikely to outweigh the benefits of belonging to a gang. It is however, important to note that this study was undertaken before the signing of peace accords in Guatemala.

Box 8 'Push and pull' factors contributing to the formation of youth gangs

• Armed conflict	• Migration movements
• Character of urban expansion	• Privatisation of public space
• Weakening of the family unit	• High levels of intrafamily violence
• Deportation of youth from the US	• Poverty
• Lack of opportunities	• Authoritarian character of civic culture
• Social belonging	

Source: Ramos (n.d.); comments on draft document

Concluding comment: Gangs as social movements?

The sheer numbers of young people, particularly men, who are 'signed up' members of *mara* groups across the region suggests that the phenomenon may be viewed as a form of 'social movement', constituted essentially by disaffected, excluded youth asserting their social identity through violent acts. In this sense it can be argued that *mara* membership offers a sense of identity and belonging.

Consequently, if solutions are to have a significant effect, they need to understand the complex causal factors influencing gang membership – in other words to specify what such interventions are intended to replace. This requires an approach that is capable of addressing the multiple dynamics of gang life. It is also important to note the circularity of many youth gang-related factors. Of specific relevance is the cyclical relationship between violence in the home and the violence in the form of gangs.

3.4 The Costs and Consequence of Violence in Central America

Closely related to the causal factors underlying violence are the costs and consequences of violent action. Economic monetary cost data can provide a common, interpretable metric for understanding the impact of crime on both individuals and society. This allows for a comparison with the costs of other social ills and a useful comparative tool to highlight the importance of violence reduction strategies. As Macmillan (2000) suggests, this more often than not highlights the relative importance of the costs of violence, with important policy implications in terms of cost-benefit assessments of different policy options (specifically preventative vs. curative).

Most Latin American research on the costs of violence is based on the categorization of direct and indirect costs of violence. This makes a distinction between the gross costs borne by the victim and the net macroeconomic costs (for example a kidnapping does not give rise to costs in macroeconomic terms, since it is a transfer and does not add or remove value). The Inter-American Development for instance, has funded an extensive research program throughout the region based on this approach (see Box 9).

Box 9 Inter-American Development Bank approaches to measuring the costs of violence

- **Direct costs**: health system, police, justice system, housing and social services
- **Indirect costs**: higher morbidity and mortality due to homicides and suicides, abuse of alcohol and drugs, depressive disorders.
- **Economic multiplier effects**: macroeconomic impacts, impacts on the labour market and inter-generational productivity
- **Social multiplier effects**: impact on inter-person relations and on the quality of life

Source: Arriagada and Godoy (2000: 117)

Probably the greatest advances have been made with measurements of the direct economic costs of violence, the associated losses due to deaths and disabilities, and 'transferrals' resulting from property crimes, calculated as percentages of GNP or GDP. However, constraints include not only methodological issues but also, in many contexts, lack of access to information on violence related expenditure assessments of the police, the judiciary, the penal system and even the armed forces. At the same time, many of the components of indirect costs, both for individual victims and the society as a whole, are intangible and in this case no reliable quantitative data exists – indeed it may be futile to attempt to quantify something so complex and subjective.

At the same time, both levels and types of violence impact dramatically on people's well being in terms of their livelihood security, as well as the functioning of local social institutions. Consequently a framework that identifies the linkages between violence and the capital assets and capabilities associated with livelihood security can further assist in identifying the costs of violence at the local level. From the extensive 'livelihood' debate a consensus has emerged with regard to the identification of five types of capital assets: physical, financial, human, social and natural (see Box 10) (Chambers and Conway, 1993; Carney, 1998; Moser and Norton, 2001: 5). The multiple outcomes of violence then can also be analysed in terms of their direct and indirect effects on various types of capital assets. This counters the common tendency to recognise the importance of non-economic outcomes of violence, but to ultimately render them immeasurable.

However, costs still remain difficult to measure despite decades of research – with extensive debates as to the accuracy of different estimates. In addition, given severe data limitations regional comparisons are difficult to make, as in the case of this study. This section, therefore, only provides a very preliminary introduction to a highly complex issue, while pointing the way to areas of further research.

Box 10 Definition of capital assets

Physical capital (also known as *produced* or *man-made capital*) comprises the stock of plant, equipment, infrastructure and other productive resources owned by individuals, the business sector or the country itself.

Financial capital consists of the financial resources available to people (savings, supplies of credit).

Human capital includes investments in education, health, and the nutrition of individuals. Labour is a critical asset linked to investments in human capital; health status determines people's capacity to work, and skill and education determine the returns from their labour.

Social capital is defined as the rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and societies' institutional arrangements, which enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives. Social capital is embedded in social institutions at the micro-institutional level – communities and households – as well as referring to the rules and regulations governing formalised institutions in the market-place, the political system, and civil society.

Natural capital includes the stocks of environmentally provided assets such as soil, atmosphere, forests, minerals, water and wetlands. In rural communities the critical productive asset for the poor is land; in urban areas it is land for shelter.

Sources: Carney (1998), Moser (1998), Narayan (1997), Serageldin (1996)

Violence and the erosion of financial and physical capital assets

As identified in Box 10, physical and financial capital comprises both the stock of plant, equipment, infrastructure and other productive resources as well as the financial resources available to people. One of the most important costs of violence in terms of financial and physical capital are the drain on savings and other capital stock in terms of the resources allocated to reduce or control the phenomenon. Despite increased state investment, the inability to control rising violent crime often results in households and businesses relying on private security to control or prevent violence, which in turn reduces the legitimacy of the state (Arriagada and Godoy, 2000).[20]

- In **Guatemala,** according to a national victimisation survey, 7.1% of households pay for their own private security. Consequently the total budget for private spending on security is at least 20% greater than the public security budget, and amounts annually to an estimated Q26.81million (approximately $3.5 million) (*ibid.*)

- In **El Salvador** the total cost of private security was estimated as close to $7,207,202 in 1998 (IUDOP, 1998). In addition, privately incurred costs of healthcare resulting from violence, such as paying for consultations, transport, examinations and medicines, total approximately $27 million annually (IUDOP, 1998)

However, illegal expenses are often the highest direct cost of violence. In El Salvador in 1996 total expenditure amounted to $280,953,780, of which 60.6% was on police activity, and 38.2% the judiciary (IUDOP, 1998). This is equivalent to 4.9% of GDP (Cruz and González, 1997), with the overall legal and institutional costs of violence accounting for an estimated 67.5% of public investment in El Salvador (IUDOP, 1998). Thus the total quantifiable costs, both direct and indirect, of violence in El Salvador amounted to more than 13% of GDP in 1995 (IUDOP, 1998).

Loss of earnings due to violence is another important financial capital cost. In **El Salvador** in 1997 this was reported to be $495,733,585 (Cruz and González, 1997). Indeed, in 1995 deaths alone led to an estimated cost of $166,562,592 in lost earnings (IUDOP, 1998). According to a 1995 survey, loss of goods and materials as a result of crime amounted to an estimated value of $223,369,535 in El Salvador (IUDOP, 1998).

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[20] An ineffective judicial and police system also reduces the costs of crime for those committing it, and therefore increases the relative benefits of committing crime.

Table 11 shows total financial losses related to different crimes in **Guatemala.** This shows that the cost of violent crime was significantly higher than non-violent crime. On a smaller scale, every business in Guatemala suffers losses of an average of Q 42, 270 (approximately $5,490) due to crime each year.

Table 11 Economic costs of crime in Guatemala, 1999

Incident	Estimated loss (Q millions)	$ equivalent (millions)
Robbery without violence	1,925.8	250
Armed assault	2,341.3	304
Threat, extortion or blackmail	66.8	8.7
Physical aggression	15.9	2
Sexual attack	3.9	0.5
Total	4,353.8	565.4

Source: Rubio (n.d.)

Violence and the erosion of human capital assets

As defined in Box 10, human capital assets include investments in education and health. One of the direct costs of violence, therefore, is increased private and public spending on health. In El Salvador it was estimated that institutional costs for the recuperation of health in 1998 were close to $20,382,161. The overall added health burden of violence was therefore in excess of $47 million (IUDOP, 1998).

Human capital assets also include the health status that determines people's capacity to work. At the Latin American level, Londoño (1996, cited in Moser and Grant, 2000) argues that the net accumulation of human capital in Latin America and the Caribbean over the last 15 years has been cut in half due to the increase in crime and violence over this period. Indeed, loss of human capital due to violence amounts to an estimated 1.9% of GDP in Latin America, which is equivalent to the total spending on primary education (CIEN, n.d.).

In El Salvador, for instance, in 1996 78,726 people were injured by intentional violence – a rate of 1,360 per 100,000 inhabitants (Cruz and González, 1997). In the same year, 180,000 years of life were lost to premature death in El Salvador, 52% of which were due to firearms (*ibid*.). Table 12 shows data from Guatemala on intentional deaths and injuries per 100,000 inhabitants between 1996 and 1998.

Table 12 Intentional deaths and injuries per 100,000 inhabitants: 1996–1998, Guatemala

	1996	1997	1998
Intentional deaths	35.1	37.6	30.2
Intentional injuries	51.4	52.2	44.8

Source: UNDP (1999b)

i.   The impact of domestic violence on women's human and financial capital assets

It is important to provide a separate section on the costs of domestic violence, given the gravity of this type of violence. Economic cost studies all demonstrate the financial impact of violence against women, including the quantification of the psychological impacts of domestic violence on women, and the long-term repercussions for their children. While such quantifiable *costs* are by no means the only *consequences* of violence against women, they are useful in highlighting the pervasive impacts of the problem. Yodanis *et al*

(2000: 273) argue that violence against women is not 'a 'private' problem. Rather, it is unquestionably a 'public' problem because the whole of society pays monetarily, as well as non-monetarily'.

The costs of violence against women are generally calculated in terms of the health impact (specifically the increased demand for health care), as well as the loss of productivity and earnings. Health costs of violence against women are both physical and psychological. The health impacts of domestic violence include the following: serious injuries, injuries during pregnancy, injuries to children, unwanted and early pregnancy (due to rape or lack of control over contraception), STDs (including HIV), increased vulnerability to disease, and psychological consequences such as suicide, mental health problems, and effects on children. The health burden of gender-based victimisation among women between 15 and 44 is comparable to that posed by other established risks such as HIV, cancer, tuberculosis, and cardiovascular disease (World Bank 1993, cited in Heise et al, 1994).

The study of domestic violence in Nicaragua, mentioned in a previous section, details the incidence of health problems among victims of domestic abuse. Women suffering from emotional distress were reportedly six times more likely to have experienced lifetime spousal abuse than women who did not suffer emotional distress (Ellsberg, 1997b). It stands to reason, therefore, that abused women have higher suicidal tendencies than non-abused women (reported rates of 17% and 5% respectively in Nicaragua) (INEC/MINSA, 1998).

Domestic violence against women also affects their children, with evidence showing that a child's health is at greater risk if their mother suffers domestic violence (see Chart 6). The higher mortality rate among children of abused mothers is thought to be due to violence during pregnancy, or perhaps to a lack of control over household resources to provide for the child. An IDB study in Nicaragua has shown that children from families in which women are subjected to severe domestic violence, are 100 times more likely to be hospitalised (IDB, 1997). In Managua, Nicaragua, it was also found that abused women use health services (surgery, hospitalisation and visits due to illness) about twice as frequently as non-abused women (Morrison and Orlando, 1999), which clearly implies an institutional and personal financial burden.

Domestic violence also has an effect on women's earnings. Women in Nicaragua who suffer severe domestic violence have earnings which are approximately 57% of those who do not suffer domestic violence, while victims of sexual violence earn only 46% of the income of non-abused women. Domestic violence is an important determinant of earnings, but earnings are not an important determinant of domestic violence. Indeed, domestic violence in Nicaragua is thought to reduce women's earnings by $29.5 million, which is equivalent to 1.6% of GDP (Morrison and Orlando, 1999).

There is no consensus as to whether or not domestic violence affects women's labour force participation. In Managua, no significant relationship was found between abuse in general and work outside the home, although psychologically abused women were found to work significantly more outside the home: 38% of women compared to 24% of psychologically non-abused women. The only important predictors of female labour force participation were found to be age and years of schooling (Morrison and Orlando, 1999).

Just as domestic violence incurs economic costs through the goods and services used in treatment or prevention, so are goods and services lost, through absenteeism, decreased productivity while working and job loss, as a result of domestic violence (Morrison and Orlando, 1999). In 1993, the World Bank calculated the global costs of domestic violence and rape to be equal to 6% of the total disability adjusted life years of healthy life lost, and 90% of the morbidity associated with disability from injury (Moser and Grant, 2000). Data on the institutional costs of violence against women specifically, in terms of legal costs and support services, are not available, but the data presented above highlights the far-reaching costs of violence against women.

Children living in a violent household are affected in terms of their health, and also their own use of violence within relationships. In addition, living in an environment of abuse can lead to a long-term loss of human capital through reduced educational performance. In Nicaragua some 63% of these children repeat a grade at school and on average drop out at age nine, compared to age 12 of women who are not the victims of severe abuse (IDB, 1997). Morrison and Orlando (1999), however, find there to be no significant relationship between school performance and living in an abusive household. Indeed, it was found that children from

non-abusive homes are four times more likely to have disciplinary problems, and also marginally more likely to have disciplinary problems.

ii.   Violence and the erosion of social capital assets

Social capital is most frequently defined as 'rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and societies' institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives' (Narayan 1997: 50). Social capital can be inclusive or exclusive in nature and therefore is not necessarily beneficial for all. It is clear that 'social capital for some implies social exclusion for others' (Harriss and De Renzio, 1997: 926). While violent conflict can undermine social capital, it can also reconstitute it. In examining the impact of violence on social capital, it is useful to distinguish between productive and perverse social capital, as well as between structural and cognitive social capital.[21]

The Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA) in Guatemala identified a paucity of cognitive social capital in local communities with widespread complaints of lack of trust and unity (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001). People repeatedly expressed extreme reluctance to collaborate with their neighbours. In San Pedro Sacatepéquez, San Marcos, one elderly woman stated, 'No one gets involved in the lives of others', while another woman said, 'Everyone lives their own lives'. People referred to norms and strategies of silence, known as the '*cultura de silencio*' (culture of silence). Lack of trust generated conflicts, sometimes violent in nature. These usually revolved around gratuitous violence. These, physical and verbal conflict among neighbours over access to water, and fights over income generating activities such as market stalls (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Causal impact diagram of fights over market stalls in Limoncito, San Marcos, prepared by two adult men (aged 23 and 32)
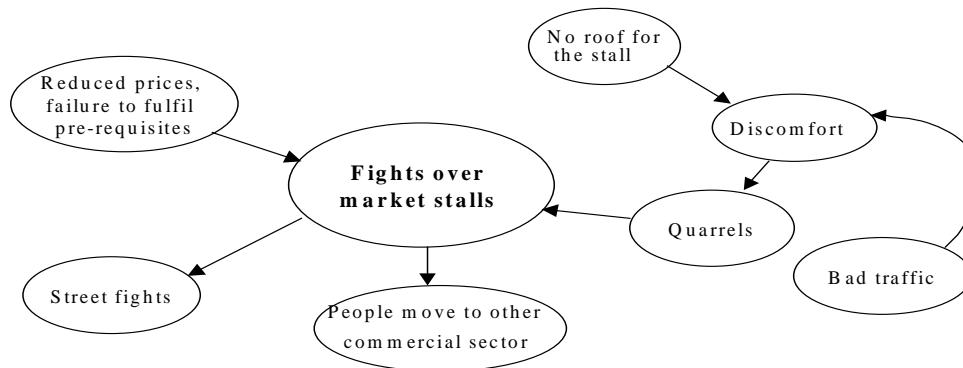
Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2001)

The PUA identified an extensive number of social organisations, mainly service related, including schools, hospitals, churches, and NGOs. These were usually foreign, such as Médecins Sans Frontières, UNICEF, and

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[21] Mauricio Rubio (1997) distinguishes between 'productive' social capital as that which may generate institutional change and favour growth and 'perverse' social capital as networks, and legal and reward systems that encourage rent-seeking behaviour and criminal activity. Thus productive social capital/social organisations in local communities are those that generate favourable outcomes both for its members and for the community at large. In contrast, 'perverse' social capital/social organisations are those that have positive benefits for its members but in contrast include negative outcomes for wider communities. Perverse social organisations frequently are based on the use of force, violence and/or illegal activities. A second important differentiation is between structural and cognitive social capital (Uphoff, 1997; 2000). Structural social capital encompasses the types of interpersonal relationships that relate to formal or informal organisations or networks, and deals with the arena of roles. Cognitive social capital relates to the realm of ideas, denoting instrumental ideas (such as routines and repertoires) and normative ideas, revolving around values, norms, attitudes and beliefs. Thus 'structural social capital' is used to refer to social organisations and formal networks of trust and cohesion. In contrast, cognitive social capital denotes invisible informal elements of trust, altruism, and charity as experienced between individuals in communities.

World Vision. However there were far fewer local membership organisations, reflecting the erosion of many local organisations during the long period of armed conflict, as illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8 Institutional mapping of Limoncito, San Marcos, prepared by two shoemakers (aged 28 and 50)
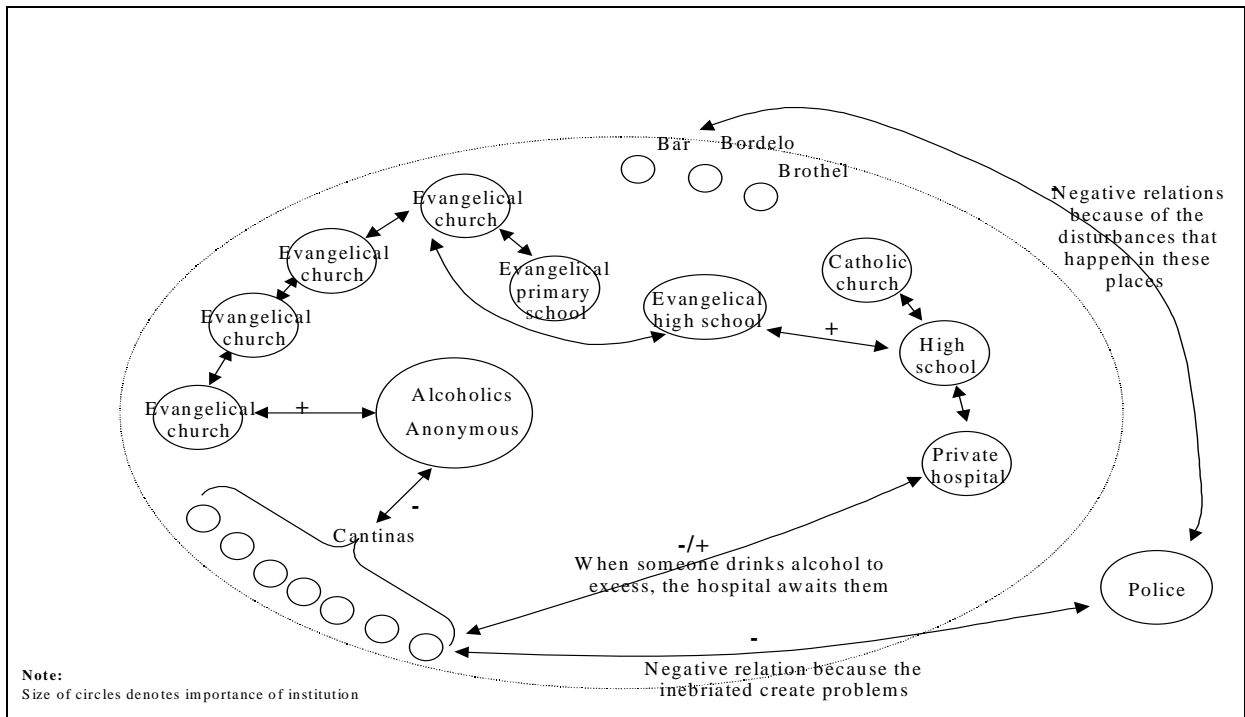
Source: Moser and McIlwaine (2001)

The main perverse organisations were those linked to gangs (*maras)*, bars (*cantinas*) and brothels (*bares/bordellos*). Levels of trust in local institutions were generally low. The most trusted membership organisations were youth, sports and recreation groups (with 82 per cent receiving a positive ranking), followed by religious groups (79 per cent viewed positively). Drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres – primarily Alcoholics Anonymous – received the highest percentage of positive rankings among service delivery organisations. Where women's organisations existed, they were generally highly trusted (76%). Finally there was a lack of trust in state security and justice organisations, with the police and the army received the highest percentage of negative rankings (61 per cent). However, the reformed police force (*Policia Nacional Civil* – National Civil Police – reformed as a result of the Peace Accords) was generally more favourably perceived than its predecessor (Moser and McIlwaine, 2001).

3.5 An Integrated Framework for Intervention

Background: Recent policy approaches to violence reduction

Interventions to reduce violence generally have been dominated by a particular policy approach and its associated professional discipline. Each tends to prioritise a specific type of violence and focus on a particular target group. At the same time, violence reduction approaches have shifted over the past decade in terms of their relative popularity.

Table 13 Different 'ideal type' policy approaches to violence reduction

Approach	*Objective*	*Violence category addressed*	*Intervention*	*Limitations*
Criminal justice	Violence deterrence and control through higher arrest, conviction rates and more severe punishment	Economic	Top-down strengthening of judicial, penal, and police systems and their associated institutions	Limited applicability to contexts of political and social violence; success dependent on enforcement; restraints in human resources capacity
Public health	Violence prevention through the reduction of individual risk factors	Economic Social	Top-down surveillance; risk factor identification; resultant behaviour modification; scaling up of successful interventions	Almost exclusive focus on individual; often imposed top-down; sensitive to quality of surveillance data; limitations in indicators; restraints in human resources capacity
Conflict transformation	Achieving non-violent resolution of conflict through negotiated terms between conflicting parties	Political/ Institutional Social	Top-down or bottom-up conflict reduction negotiations between different social actors	Often long-term in its impact; faces challenges in bringing parties to the table and in mediating conflict; restraints in human resources capacity
Human rights	Legal enforcement of human rights and documentation of abuses by states, and other social actors	Political Social	Top-down legal enforcement reinforced by bottom-up participation and NGO lobbying	Legal framework often difficult to enforce in lawlessness contexts; corruption and impunity; restraints in human resources capacity
Social capital	Building social capital through both informal and formal social institutions, including family, community and judiciary	Political Economic Social	Bottom-up participatory violence appraisal; institutional mapping;; community participation reduction measures	Less well articulated than other approaches; fewer indicators developed; restraints in human resources capacity
Citizen security	Composite set of measures to prevent and/or reduce violence	Economic Social	Multi-sectoral government directed approach	Promoted by the IADB: very popular with governments seeking to address governments concerned

Table 13 outlines some of main policy approaches as 'ideal types'. In reality more than one approach is often used simultaneously, with well-established approaches often combined with more innovative ones. Nevertheless, by way of contextual background, it is useful to briefly describe each in turn.

One of the earliest, widely established violence reduction approaches is **criminal justice**. This top-down approach focuses on deterrence and control of violence through higher rates of arrest, conviction, and punishment, facilitated by judicial, police, and penal reform. It is often particularly popular among politicians seeking high profile, short-term solutions to the symptoms of violence.

Currently most popular is the **public health** approach that focuses on economic and social violence. This aims to prevent violence by reducing individual risk factors. It draws on epidemiological surveillance – especially homicide rates – to develop risk reduction strategies for modifying individual behaviour, modifications in the social and physical environment, or both. In focusing on specific 'at risk' target groups

it has, in some contexts, become widely associated with gangs. Over time it has broadened its focus to include not only prevention but also rehabilitation.

The **conflict transformation** approach aims primarily to reduce armed conflict and to rebuild the fabric of societies, although more recently it has become associated with violence more generally. Historically small pacifist groups, such as the Quakers, have played an important role in conflict transformation. More recently international institutions, such as the United Nations, have also begun to address political violence through non-violent negotiation among conflicting parties, often relying on third-party mediation. However, since excluded groups often do not participate in international or national conflict transformation and peace talks, their legitimate interests and needs are often not recognised in peace negotiations.

The **human rights** approach, a 'rights-based approach' to armed conflict and political/ institutional violence reduction, focuses on the role of the state in protecting citizens' rights to be free from the threat or victimisation of violence. Drawing on the documentation of abuse in relation to international human rights conventions, it addresses political and social violence. Here again civil society institutions have played a critical role in the contestation of rights.

The **social capital** approach, still in the early stages of development, focuses on rebuilding social cohesion in informal and formal institutions such as families, gangs and community organisations. Using bottom-up, participatory processes, it aims to create trust by building on the strengths and assets of communities affected by violence and community-based identification of their needs. It also provides the potential for community needs to be scaled up to public sector interventions.

Given the multiple layering of violence, and associated identity of different social actors experiencing violence, policymakers are beginning to shift away from menu-like checklists of single-sector interventions towards more integrated approaches. The **citizen security** approach is one such integrated approach that incorporates interventions that prevent and reduce violence through a menu of different initiatives. As the name implies the overall objective is to provide better security for citizens rather than tackling the underlying causes of violence themselves. Interventions tend to be top-down in focus and vary according to government prioritisation.

In the particular context of 'post-conflict' Central America, the concept of 'citizen security' has become increasingly popular as the umbrella title for a diversity of violence reduction interventions. The term first gained prominence in the region during the 1990s as an alternative to the concept of 'national security'. Under authoritarian regimes the concept of a 'citizen' has limited applicability, and so the concept of 'citizen security' is seen to foster a type of security that emphasises the individual within a democratic context, rather than the coercive functions of the state. The term originally referred to the physical security of persons and goods but increasingly has become synonymous activities that also focus on violence prevention.

Key institutions working on violence in the Central American region and their associated focus on violence reduction

Widespread violence in the different countries in the Central American region has resulted in increasing government and civil society concern about the urgent need to tackle the issue. As a consequence there has been considerable growth not only in studies on the issue of violence, and the identification of different policy approaches to address the issue, but also in intervention-focused institutions. A systematic categorisation of the diversity of organisations working in this area is necessary for resources to be effectively prioritised and targeted at areas of greatest need. However, a compilation of existing institutions focused on violence reduction presents enormous challenges in terms of accurate information concerning a number of issues that are vital for policy recommendations. These include, for instance:
- Comprehensive coverage of current programmes and projects, particularly important small-scale pilot initiatives undertaken by NGOs
- Identification of the underlying policy approach of such interventions
- Realistic assessment of the capacity of institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, to implement violence reduction interventions

Interventions can be categorised in a number of ways, including at the following two levels:
- International and regional level
- National and local level within each of the four countries in the Central American region

In addition, at the country level interventions can be classified in terms of different types that may include the following:
- Advocacy
- Research
- State programmes
- Community level projects

Detailed mapping of such institutions is an important and time-consuming task that needs to be undertaken at the country level. This goes well beyond the remit of an introductory study such as this and is an important next stage. Nevertheless, by way of a background, an introductory very partial picture is provided in Annex 2. This is intended to serve as guidance for further country specific work.

An integrated framework for intervention: linking violence reduction, citizen security and citizenship

As highlighted in previous sections of this study, the daily lives of the populations in all four countries in the Central American region are dominated to varying extents by complex, multiple forms of violence that can be categorised as political, social and economic in objective and nature. Table 8 provided a roadmap of the types of violence and their associated manifestations, and illustrated how these can range along a continuum from institutional state violence at one end, through to gratuitous, routine daily violence at the other end.

Obviously different types of violence also call for a range of interventions. At the same time these need to be undertaken in an interrelated manner. An **Integrated Framework for Intervention** provides an essential planning tool. This allows practitioners to undertake the following:
- Effectively map existing interventions
- Identify critical gaps
- Prioritise limited resources in terms of filling essential gaps

Table 14 provides a tabulated summary of such an Integral Framework for Intervention. It identifies four essential interrelated components that practitioners need to address:

Comprehensive categorisation of the continuum of violence
Depending on the objective of the framework this can be undertaken at country, regional or city level. It is essential, however, to include all types of violence and, where ever possible highlight the interrelationships between them.

Distinction between violence reduction interventions that address three interrelated issues:
- Reduce violence
- Improve citizen safety
- Increase sense of citizenship

Identification of different levels of intervention
- State policies at the regional level
- National level policy such as laws and reform measures
- National level programs
- Local government level programs
- Civil society programs and projects

The design of measures with different time trajectories that distinguish between
- Short term
- Medium / long term

The mapping of a violence intervention strategy will assist policymakers in a number of ways. These include the following:

- To identify the most appropriate balance of interventions in resource constraints contexts.
- To demonstrate how short term high profile measures, such as against *maras*, need to be complemented by other longer term strategies
- To highlight less visible types of intra-household violence that need addressing
- To show that the most serious types of violence as manifest for instance by organised crime require structural /institutional reforms relating to the police force, justice system, penal system and impunity

Table 14 Integrated framework for violence reduction

Type of Violence		Types of solution					
		Reduction of violence		Improve citizen security		Increase citizenship	
	Level of Intervention	Short term	Med/ long term	Short term	Med/ long term	Short term	Med/ long term
Organised crime	*State policy at regional level*						
	State policy at national level						
	Central state programs						
	Local state program						
	Civil society programmes and projects						
Institutional violence by formal and informal institutions	*						
Gangs	*						
Delinquency/ Robbery	*						
Street Children	*						
Domestic violence	*						
Child abuse	*						
Inter-generational conflict	*						
Gratuitous random violence	*						

* = Similar range of interventions to those identified in the case of organised violence

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Annex 1 Comparative Statistical Data

Chart 1 Regional homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants 1994–1999

	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua	Average
☐ 1994	164.5	69.8	38.2	16.5	72
■ 1996	139	66.9	37.2	15.6	65
☐ 1998	82.4	76.9	40.7	13.3	53
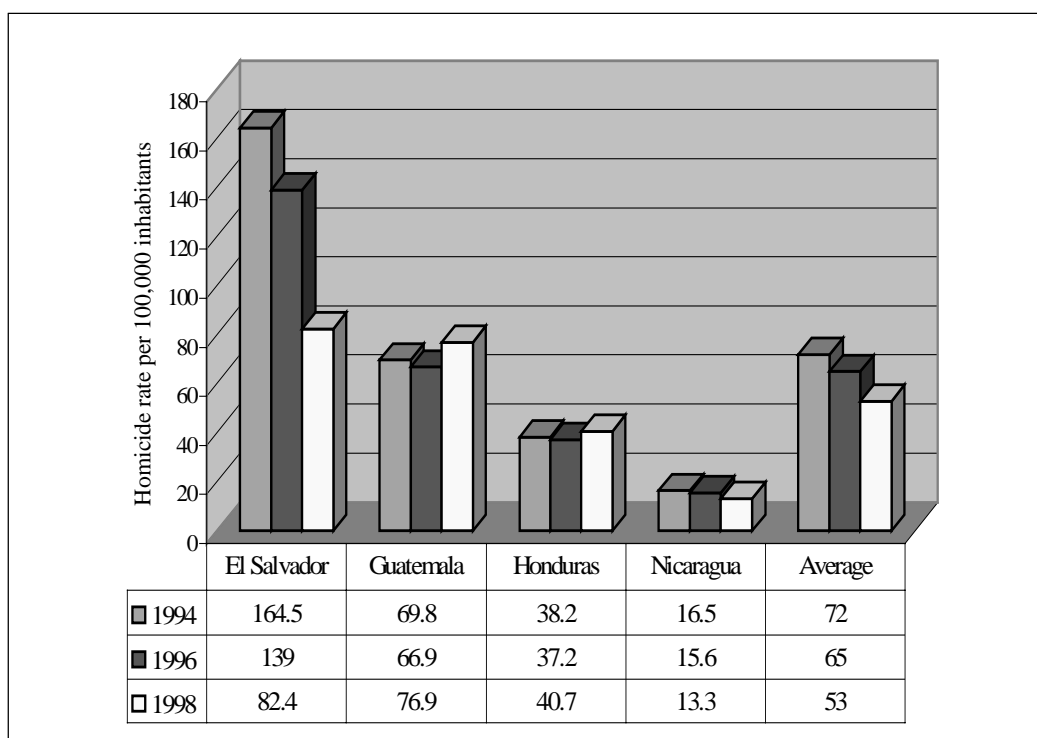
Source: Adapted from Call (2000)

Chart 2 Number of police recorded homicides January–April 2000, according to area and type of weapon, El Salvador

	urban	rural
☐ firearm	212	291
■ light weapon	43	86
☐ other	36	42
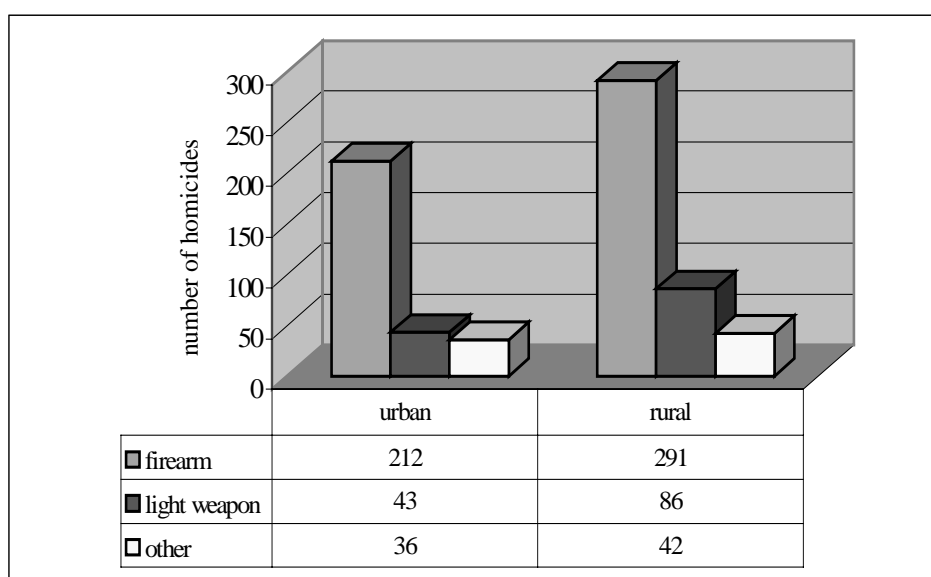
Source: Cruz and Beltrán (2000)

Chart 3 Intentional death rate per 100,000 inhabitants, by ethnicity of department: 1998 Guatemala
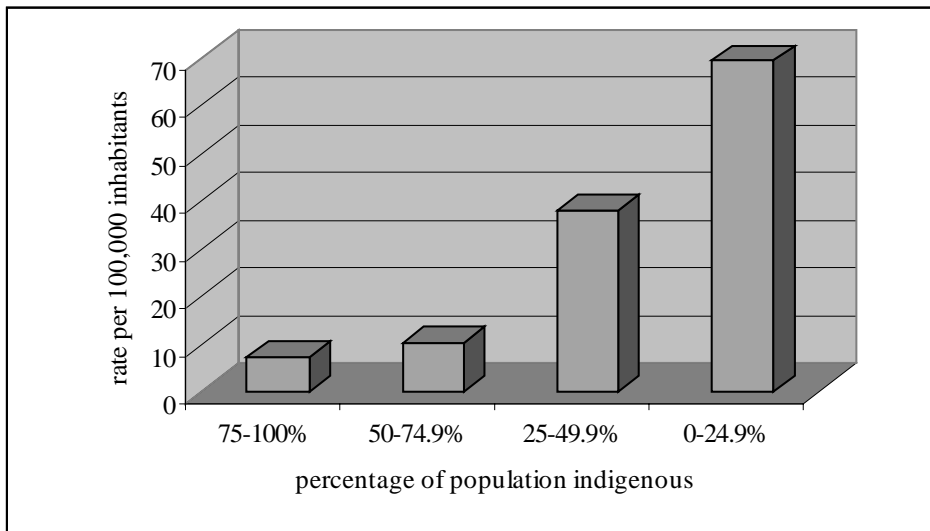
Chart 4 Total robberies,* rate per 100,000 inhabitants according to ethncity of department, Guatemala, 1996 and 1998
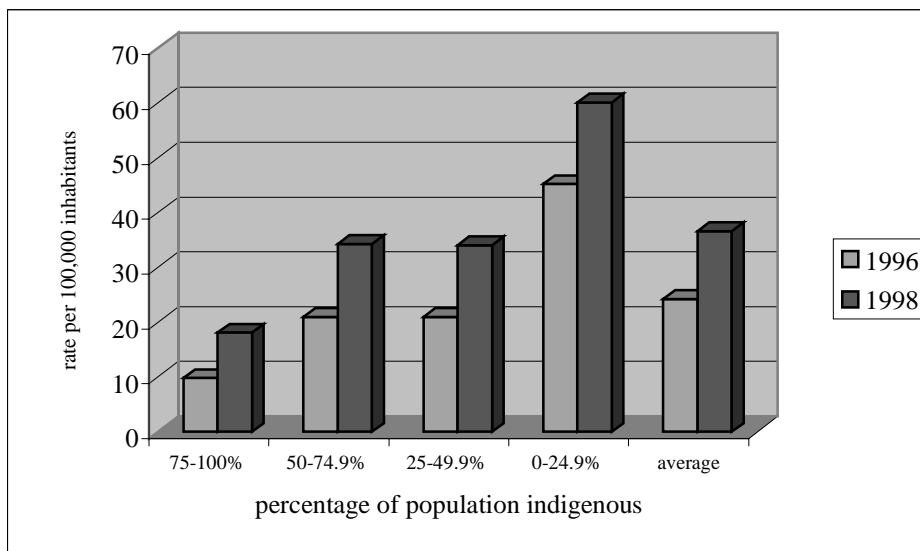
Chart 5 Percentage of 1,025 gang members surveyed who had suffered bereavement or injury, San Salvador, 1996
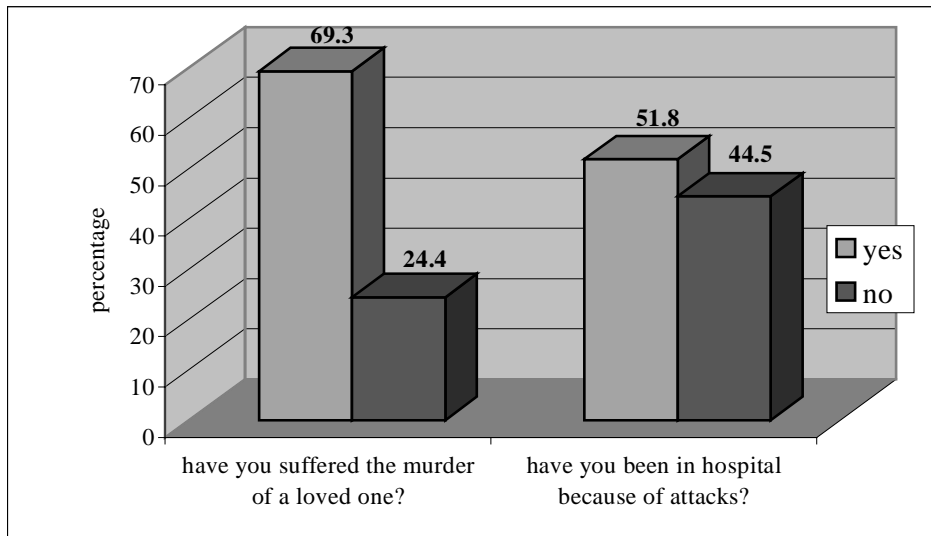
Source: Cruz (1997)

Chart 6 Indicators of child health according to violence suffered by mother, Nicaragua 1998
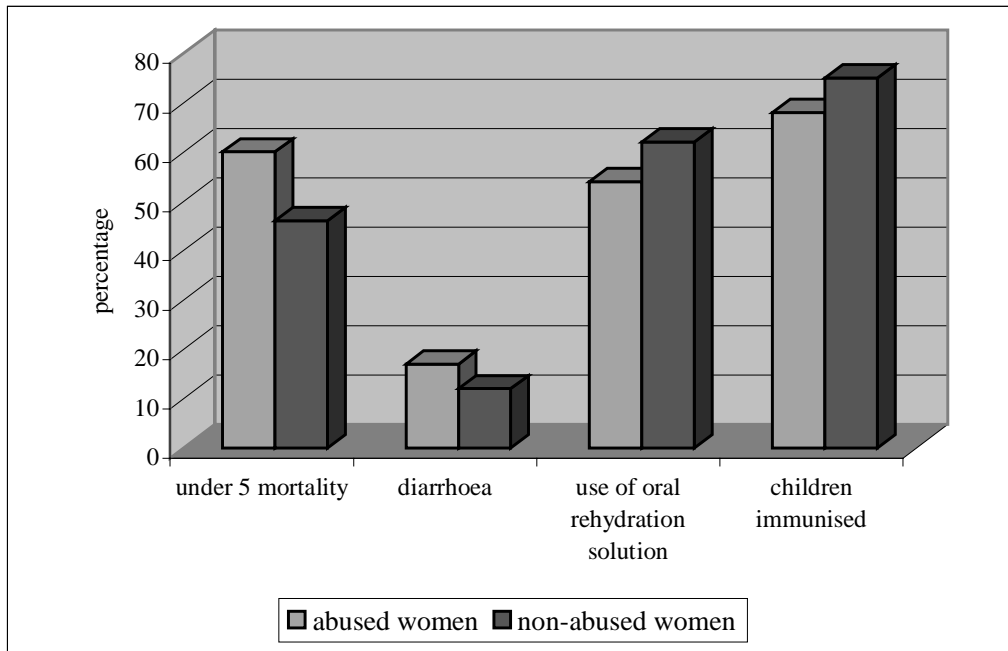
Source: Adapted from INEC/MINSA (1998)

Annex 2 Regional Institutional Interventions

With contributions from Charles Call, Brown University

It is important to reiterate that this is only a provisional introduction to regional institutional violence reduction interventions. In particular, it is recognised that it does not sufficiently explore the very important contributions of European donors, such as those of Spain and the European Union, nor does it adequately cover the work of PAHO and the IDB. It is intended to offer guidance for future country-level work, and as such concludes with a provisional matrix which may assist national institutional mapping.

Provisional summary analysis of violence reduction and citizen security interventions in the Central American region

The last two decades have seen important shifts in conflict and violence reduction focused interventions. In the context of counterinsurgency during the 1980s, neither international agencies nor local governments identified violence as a policy concern. Most bilateral development agencies, wary of police assistance and violence reduction activities, focused their programs on human rights non-governmental activity, while the United States concentrated on justice and police reforms (Huggins, 1998; McClintock, 1985; Popkin, 1998). Subsequently aid to police and judicial state institutions increased in conjunction with support for peace processes.

By the mid-1990s, as political violence ebbed throughout the region and crime waves caused a threat to democracy and peace, donor interest shifted to 'citizen security':

- The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), for instance, initiated projects on violence prevention and reduction, especially targeting domestic violence
- The World Bank began supporting judicial reforms in some countries
- In El Salvador, recognition that violence reduction projects would not succeed unless long-term causes were addressed, resulted in a growing discourse on violence prevention and violence reduction, and programs to address youth violence
- 'Community Policing' projects were developed both by governments and non-governmental organisations
- In Honduras state police and judicial reforms began - similar to those already undertaken in El Salvador and Guatemala

Across the region, the following six areas of intervention focused either directly or indirectly on citizen security and violence:

i) Judicial reform
Judicial reform has been and continues to be carried out principally through major donors in multi-year, multi-million dollar projects, with USAID playing the predominant role. Despite considerable progress, there remain serious deficiencies in judicial systems, especially in Nicaragua and Honduras. Areas of particular weakness include civil society groups conducting research and advocacy on judicial reform; law school and in-service legal training for judicial operators; and transparency.

ii) Police reform / citizen security
Over the past fifteen years, the United States, the United Nations (its peacekeeping operations and UNDP), and Spain have been the principal donors concerned with official police assistance. The largest and most advanced projects have been in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Panama, and their continued professionalisation requires additional resources, including in-service training, oversight mechanisms and specialised units. The United States is likely to support ongoing anti-narcotics and anti-terrorism efforts. Smaller projects have existed in Nicaragua and Honduras. However, additional projects with the national police forces in both countries would provide significant opportunities for improving citizen security. The central challenge in reforming the police is to ensure that they respond to community and citizen priorities, whether through

government or NGO initiatives. However, a serious evaluation of existing community-level security programs would greatly assist the facilitation of future projects.

iii) Family violence

Over the past ten years tremendous gains have been achieved in the region, as each country has passed new domestic violence legislation, as well as enhancing state efforts to prosecute perpetrators of family violence. However, practice lags behind new legislative and bureaucratic frameworks. Nevertheless local populations do not have the same negative image of government agencies as they do of police and justice agencies. For this reason support to government agencies has the potential to enhance state capacity and reach large numbers of the population. At present in many cases, state offices for women's issues, and intersectoral violence prevention commissions, do not receive sufficient funds from the central government to operate effectively.

Research on domestic violence is still very weak with little information concerning the relative success of different approaches to domestic violence reduction. NGO research, advocacy and preventative/treatment projects are often small and with little professional capacity. Services for women victims remain scarce. Public institutions, including police stations who receive complaints, police officers who investigate reported sexual crimes, judicial officers trying or judging cases of gendered crimes, are insufficiently trained or organised to deal with such cases.

iv) Youth violence

The proliferation of Central American initiatives to treat and prevent youth violence means the region has become a centre of interest for countries seeking to learn about new innovative ways to address the issue. However, recent efforts, especially in El Salvador, merit further evaluation in terms of their effectiveness, as well as their applicability to other contexts. For instance, it is not clear whether the use of former gang members to help prevent criminal activity by youth gangs is successful, or what impact neighbourhood recreational or educational programs have on gang membership.

v) Human rights

The most serious violations of human rights – including rights to life and physical integrity – have declined precipitously, reflecting a reduction in political violence. The most common human rights violations currently tend to be in categories such as arbitrary detentions and excessive use of force. State promotion of human rights has become much more significant in the past decade, with formal commitment to the full range of political rights (though not socio-economic rights). The creation of human rights advocates/ombudspersons has also created a source of state monitoring that rivals or exceeds that of NGO capacity in every country except Nicaragua and possibly Guatemala.

Central American human rights NGOs have been slow to confront new forms of violence, and generally reluctant to work with state organisations to improve their performance. Consequently, they have not generally been among the most innovative actors in violence prevention and reduction. They remain an important source of accountability for state organisations and for monitoring political violence.

vi) Community transformation / conflict resolution

This is a very new area that requires further research and needs assessments as well as the evaluation of the effectiveness of existing programs. Among the most interesting experiments are projects to improve the status, effectiveness and fairness of traditional or indigenous systems of justice and conflict resolution, especially in Guatemala.

International and regional programmes in violence prevention and citizen security

A wide range of international and regional institutions are involved in activities relating to violence reduction in Central America, which can be summarised as follows:

i) Multilateral and regional international institutions

These undertake research and conferences at the regional level, but are also of primary importance in the development of country level programmes and projects. These include the UNDP, World Bank, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO; youth violence and domestic violence), and the IDB (the latter are members of an Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence (IACPV).

The IDB has an extensive violence prevention programme that includes the following components:

- Conferences aimed at generating violence research and 'best practice' examples of violence prevention
- Country-level project loans on justice sector reform, citizen security (*convivencia*) as well as other projects with violence reduction components. These include 'Support to Youth Under Social Risk' (Nicaragua, $800,000); 'Community Program for Peace' (Guatemala, $56 mn); 'Support to the Reform of the Justice Sector' (Guatemala, $31 mn; El Salvador, $22 mn); Pending proposals include 'Support for Citizen Security' (Sula, Honduras, $25 mn)
- Technical co-operation grants including a 'technical umbrella' for domestic violence that provides funding for pilot projects and identifies best practices

The UNDP also has important projects across the region, with each country office enjoying a high degree of autonomy:

- In **El Salvador** work on police and judicial reforms began with the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission, expanding to a five-year program on human rights and citizen security, and a series of projects aimed at violence prevention. This included conferences and research. The UNDP also channels funds for European technical assistance to the National Civilian Police (*Policía Nacional Civil, PNC*)
- In **Guatemala** the UNDP focuses more on government institutions. Its project '*Fortaleciendo la Seguridad Publica*', supported institution-building of the PNC, the corrections system, and the judiciary. It has also supported human rights training for the PNC through its *Coordinadora de Apoyo a la Academia de la Policía Nacional Civil* (CAAP). Its '*Ampliando Acceso a la Justicia: El Organismo Judicial*' project includes expanding alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms, improving the multicultural, multiethnic character of the judicial system, improved access to legal information, education aimed at preventing lynching, construction of improved buildings, and several other activities aimed at modernisation of the judiciary. It also supports a '*Comision de Fortalecimiento a la Justicia*' project to strengthen judiciary independence and effectiveness. Its support for the '*Instituto de la Defensa Pública Penal*' seeks to establish three pilot offices of '*Defensorías Indígenas*' to help indigenous non-Spanish speakers have access to the judicial system
- Together with MINUGUA and the Swedish and Norwegian governments, UNDP-Guatemala has supported a project of civil society promotion in areas of reconciliation, human rights and justice. This includes access to justice for indigenous peoples, and advocacy promotion. Two projects are especially involved in violence prevention advocacy activities: *Centro de Estudios, Información y Bases para la Acción Social* (CEIBAS), *Fundación para la Juventud* (FUNDAJU), and *Sociedad Civil para el Desarrollo de la Juventud* (SODEJU)

The World Bank has a far smaller portfolio of violence reduction related work. In **Guatemala** it supported a judicial reform project, while its Post-Conflict Unit approves small loans quickly (e.g., three months) to address problems in post-conflict settings, including those of demobilised combatants and reintegration of refugees and ex-combatants.

Research activities include a global project on 'The Economics of Crime and Violence' that uses rational choice theory to emphasise the economic motivation for war and conflict. In addition, a recent participatory urban appraisal of urban violence in **Guatemala** was undertaken in nine urban areas, with financial support from Sida.

ii) Bilateral programmes

An important bilateral donor in the region is the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with numerous programmes across the region focusing on democratization, justice reform, and police reform. Most have concentrated on modernization of the judiciary (including the implementation of new criminal procedure codes, more efficient caseloads, and reduced partisan influence in the judiciary). The Office of Democracy and Human Rights for Latin America has shifted in focus from corruption to crime and violence prevention. With a $5 million/year regional budget over five years, it funds community-policing programs in El Salvador, and is seeking to expand its violence prevention projects.

Another bilateral programme is that of Taiwan (Republic of China). Through the presidents of Central America, the Taiwanese government allocated some $10 million in the area of citizen security in Central America a few years ago. They funded several projects in citizen security with community-based components, including a project at the *Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos* (IIDH) ($1 million), the University for Peace, and *Nicaragua Nuestra*.

iii) Washington DC based foundations and NGOs

Their primary focus is lobbying and advocacy particularly on demilitarization, democratization, arms control, police and judicial reform, and citizen security. These include the Center for International Policy (CIP), Inter-American Dialogue, and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). The Woodrow Wilson International Center, Latin America Program of commissioned research includes a citizen security programme.

iv) International NGOs

These include Save the Children (USA) and Save the Children (UK) with youth rehabilitation programs in Honduras and El Salvador.

v) Regional level institutions based in Central America

A number of regional institutions, all based out of Costa Rica are important sources of regional level research and advocacy on such issues as demilitarization, police reform, and small arms, human rights and citizen security. These include the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress, the *Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales* (CRIES), the IIDH, *Procesos*, and the University for Peace.

The University for Peace has various activities that relate to citizen security (referred to as '*seguridad democrática*'). It is the executive agency of the Republic of Taiwan financed *Comisión Mixta*, and the '*Cultura de Paz y Democracia*' project. This works with selected communities or provinces to improve citizen security in ways defined by the community. As part of the project, it has established a news agency called the '*Agencia de Buenas Noticias*' and a website (www.abn.co.cr) for positive stories of conflict resolution and understanding of living in poor communities.

- In **Honduras** it worked with the *Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras* (CODEH) and the Diocese of Olancho as co-executors of a two-year project to foster dialogue between state actors and civil society organisations aimed at reducing violence and crime. The project fostered workshops, a departmental diagnostic of problems of crime, a two-day *jornada de paz*, the symbolic burial by children of their toy guns on Army Day, and dialogue between civil society and the National Police and other ministries
- In **Guatemala**, it worked with the Mayan town of Patzún in assisting the preparation and entry into the Police Academy of several local youth to serve in the PNC
- In **Nicaragua**, it co-hosted the first meeting of the Association of Chiefs of Police of Central America with its counterpart the *Nicaragua Nuestra* Foundation

Country and local level institutions working on violence prevention and citizen security

El Salvador

a) Advocacy

El Salvador has a considerable track record in terms of advocacy work, particularly on issues relating to public security, policing and judicial reform:

- The *Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Dercho* (FESPAD) is the single best-established NGO in Central America conducting advocacy work on public security work
- WOLA's advocacy training project has focused on issues of police and judicial reform, including in its work with FESPAD, the *Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana* (IDHUCA) and other NGOs
- IDHUCA has focused upon the PNC in its documentation

Rather than conducting advocacy through lobbying and working closely with members of the legislative or executive branches, IDHUCA has focused on exemplary cases of police abuse – just as human rights NGOs classically focus on exemplary cases of political murders. IDHUCA has also sought to remedy the absence of support for the families of victims of common crime, working with those families to seek legal redress.

b) Research

The state of research on violence prevention is more advanced in El Salvador than in any other country of the region with extensive research on youth issues and citizen security (see Box 11).

Box 11 Violence related research in El Salvador

Juvenile/youth violence issues
- UNICEF *(*with IDB and Sida funding) is completing a project
- The *Unidad Técnica Ejecutora* (UTE) has conducted research projects on the justice sector, which includes the Supreme Court, the *Fiscalía*, the Ministry of Justice, and the *Instituto Salvadoreñ de Protección al Menor* (ISPM)
- UNICEF and others (the Justice Sector, the UTE, FESPAD, ISPM, UNDP, the *Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales* (FLACSO) and the Human Rights Ombudsperson) have produced three books on juvenile issues
- The *Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública* (IUDOP) of the *Universidad Centroamericana* undertook research on '*Solidaridad y Violencia en las Pandillas del gran San Salvador*'. Researchers solicited the assistance of youth gang members in designing and carrying out the survey. As a result a small group of gang members who conducted surveys set up an NGO, Homies Unidos comprised of former and current youth gang members
- FLACSO in El Salvador has also embarked on youth violence research through such projects as '*Violencia y Exclusion Social en el Area Metropolitana San Salvador*', and '*Violencia y Gobernabilidad Politica en Centroamerica*' (funded by Sweden, Italy, Norway and Holland). A third research project called '*Violencia y Sociedad en Transicion*' in Central America is funded by UNDP
- *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública* (CNSP), funded by the UNDP, was formed in January 1996 to advise the President on national public safety policies. It became a quasi-government research institution, and produced brief monographs on juvenile criminal justice policy. A particular interest in youth and gang-related violence resulted in the generation of creative means of prevention and treatment of youth offenders

Citizen Security
- FESPAD is probably the most widely recognised NGO in Central America working on citizen security. Since 1994 it has worked in the issue through two sub-organisations, the *Centro de Estudios Penales de El Salvador* (CEPES) and the *Centro de Estudios de Aplicación del Derecho* (CESPAD), completing a two-year citizen security project called 'Strengthening the Oversight Capacity of Civil Society for Public Security Policies and Human Rights in El Salvador'. It has developed working relationships with officials from the Public Security Ministry, the PNC and the court system, and is known for its work in this area, as well as its longer-standing work on issues of judicial and legal reform. It also conducted research on 'Official Mechanisms of Oversight over the National Civilian Police,' on the judicial system and the PNC, and on the role of the media and public security. It is staffed primarily by lawyers, working on research and advocacy at the national level, focused primarily on government officials and policy
- WOLA, in conjunction with 'Hemisphere Initiatives', has published several reports on the development of the PNC and judicial reforms. It distributed a 'police packet' and a 'justice packet' to provide basic information about the police and judicial institutions for use by NGOs in advocacy

Recent conferences sponsored by the IDB and the UNDP, and workshops organised by FESPAD on community policing have resulted in the production of important research papers on the PNC, accountability, the costs of violence, and on juvenile issues. These include, for instance:

- The IUDOP research paper on the costs of violence (for the IDB)
- Paper on violence in El Salvador prepared in conjunction with CRIES' regional research project
- Research on police and judicial reforms carried out by U.S.-based groups such as Hemisphere Initiatives and WOLA

While empirical research is undoubtedly strong there are critical areas for evaluation and further research. These include the following:

- The USAID-sponsored community policing project
- Youth violence prevention and treatment of youth offenders - especially important given the fact that El Salvador is seen as the regional centre of the problem and as leading attempts to address it
- Systematic research on domestic violence

c) State programmes

As part of the 1992 peace accords the El Salvadorian government implemented far-reaching reforms in the military, police and judicial systems. The PNC, incorporating both ex-government policemen and ex-guerrillas, was deployed in 1993 and grew to 16,000 as of mid-1998. The PNC is considered the best-funded police in the region, and has received significant international support. Yet widely publicised incidents of police corruption and ineffectiveness have called into question its effectiveness.

Judicial reforms received less attention in the accords, and subsequently lagged behind and faced opposition. In April 1998, after some delay, the new Criminal Procedures Code was passed giving the *Fiscalía* greater powers. A new Juvenile Justice code also went into effect in the mid-1990s, receiving much public opprobrium for easing punishment on youth precisely at a time when youth gangs, fuelled by forced and voluntary repatriations of Salvadoran teenagers from the United States, proliferated. For this reason donors such as the UNDP and the IDB have sponsored 'citizen security' projects aimed precisely at preventing and reducing violence among youth and families.

Although police and justice institution reforms have reached farther than in any other country in the region, high crime rates continue and many war-related divisions remain. Both factors continue to made citizen security a controversial topic, and one of the chief sources of citizen dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in the country.

d) Community-level projects

With IDB financial support, the UTE has launched community-level preventive security pilot projects with youth. At the conceptual level, the methodology for community work has been impressive including the following phases each of which is designed to be accomplished in a month:

- Visiting high-crime areas across the country
- Identifying the governmental agencies and NGOs who work in the area
- Selecting appropriate communities based on counterpart interest
- Identifying a single group to be the active counterpart and take ownership of the project in the community
- Training to build institutional capacity
- Supporting the community's development of a work plan
- Mobilising community and governmental actors including the local government; and carrying out the project

The IIDH and the University of Peace sponsored other community-based work in citizen security in El Salvador in the late 1990s, which included FESPAD, the IDHUCA and the IUDOP. In addition an USAID-funded International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) **community-policing project** appears to have achieved remarkable progress in lowering crime rates in the metropolitan area of the

capital. It claims success for the 23% reduction in crime rates between 1998 and 2000, and for a one-third decline in kidnapping cases. The project requires further evaluation, but is seen by some US policymakers as a model for other countries.

One of the most innovative areas relates to community level **gang projects**. Increasing recognition that oppressive approaches to the reduction of gang violence are ineffective in isolation has lead to the development of community initiatives. Equally important has been the limited success of intervention programs focusing on contacting gang members in schools. The limited success is due to the fact that many gang members do not go to school; the school environment is loaded with authority, and in treating this as an individual phenomenon it fails to acknowledge the collective nature of gangs.

FLACSO (n.d.), for instance argue that successful projects aimed at reducing gang violence are likely to be those which combine the following:

- Human component: aimed at creating a positive collective and individual identity through collective workshops and activities
- Academic component: aimed at assisting those in school and providing economic assistance to those who cannot afford to go
- Labour component: aimed at providing technical job training (human capital)
- Recreation: aimed at offering young people the space to use their free time positively

This kind of multiple approach can be used as both prevention *and* rehabilitation, and the different components can be expanded and transformed as contextually appropriate. It is notable that only two of the 75 projects in El Salvador identified in the study contained all four elements (FLACSO, n.d.).

In many ways, the *maras* are a type of youth formation, through which young people learn to socialise and interact with their environment, but the important difference is the negative impact this organisation may have in terms of violence. What is needed in terms of intervention, therefore, is to transform the vast organisational capital of gangs into something entirely positive (see Moser and McIlwaine, 2001). The '*Homies Unidos*' project takes this approach, working with (rather than against) *maras* in San Salvador, aiming to transform the negative organisational capacity of *maras* into a productive force (see Box 12). The founding members of the project are trained in principles of non-violence, conflict resolution, peer counselling and personal motivation. They also provide information about STDs including HIV, and perform rap music as a way to reach out to other gang members. Thus the gang members are given ownership of the project, and a sense of responsibility, purpose and respect. By operating within existing gang structures, the project will not destroy the positive aspects of gang life, rather transform them. The project also works to create job training, employment and income opportunities for gang members.

Box 12 Working with gangs in El Salvador: The '*Homies Unidos*' project

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Magdaleno Rose Avila, the founder of the project

'We're the only organisation that is run by gangs and by active gang members. We don't pull people out of the gangs […] we say 'we want you to remain active gang members' because we think that the gangs are not all negative. If you have a dysfunctional government and a dysfunctional family, the only family they have is the gang structure. For us to tear that away, what are we leaving them with? So we say that we're going to build a positive role model of gang members. So our guys, we ask them to renounce violence, renounce drugs, or to be in the process of moving away from that. Our job is to find a way to reach youth and excite them about a vision that is bigger than the violence they see right now – to make them see beyond the obstacles'.

Source: http://changemakers.net/studio/avila/avilatr.cfm

Guatemala

a) Advocacy

A number of NGOs are involved in advocacy activities, with the WOLA Advocacy Training project contributing to these activities and helping NGOs become more aware of the activities of others. One collaborative effort among NGOs was a one-year 'Working Group on Citizen Security' project co-ordinated

by the *Instituto de Enseñanza para el Desarrollo Sostenible* (IEPADES) in 1997–98. The group (which initially included invitations by IEPADES to the Mack Foundation, the *Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales* (IECCP), WOLA, *Familiares y Amigos de Desaparecidos y Secuestrado*s (FADS), *Madres Angustiadas*, the *Instituto de Estudios Políticos, Económicos y Sociales* (IPES), *Universidad de San Carlos* (USAC), *Universidad del Valle*, *Universidad Landívar*, *Centro de Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH) gathered together NGOs from across the political spectrum but was not very successful.

In the mid-1998 other groups included the *Comisión de Seguridad Maya*. This includes the *Centro de Estudios de la Cultura Maya* (CECMA), the *Defensoría Maya*, the *Asociación Maya de Estudiantes Universitarios*, the *Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas*, and two individual legal advisers. These use advocacy to ensure that Mayan interests are taken into account in the selection, training and deployment of PNC officers. Much of the NGO advocacy around violence and public security issues occurred in the '*Encuentros de Actualización*'. This was established between government and NGOs, not necessarily in the Civil Society Assembly dealing with the government on peace accords issues.

- IPES, historically linked to the URNG, prepared proposals on selection and deployment of the PNC and on security matters generally
- IECCP has drawn upon its own research by lobbying members of the legislature on constitutional provisions, the Police Organic Law, improved mechanisms of police oversight, and has organised fora on citizen security and on indigenous law (*derecho consuetudenario*). The IECCP is currently carrying out a UNDP-sponsored project to improve and systematise materials used in legal education and the legal system, and to develop new laws on corrections with civil society participation. It maintains a close relationship with FESPAD in El Salvador, and recognises the need for broader civic education in new concepts of security.

Advocacy is also part of IEPADES' work on citizen security. CALDH has extensive community-based work, but also engages in some advocacy. The youth organisations FUNDAJU and SODEJU are working to build support for a social service obligation. CEIBAS, with the support of the UNDP, is training officials of the Public Ministry in preventing and prosecuting family violence.

b) Research

Various organisations have conducted research on issues of citizen security in Guatemala with uneven results. These include IEPADES, USAC's Institute of Political and Social Relations (project called '*Estado de las Fuerzas de Seguridad y Sociedad Civil en Tiempos de Paz*'), and the *Universidad Landívar*, which co-ordinated a research project on violence in Guatemala which involved researchers from the IECCP and other groups.

The *Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencies Penales* (IECCP) is a research and advocacy group that focuses on prison, legal reforms and police issues. It has several activities on citizen security and police reform. The *Fundación Myrna Mack* has multiple research and advocacy projects, including judicial reform, police reform, and a prominent role in reform of intelligence agencies. The War-Torn Societies Project completed a volume on aspects of Guatemala's transition to peace that included security issues.

c) State programmes

In conjunction with the implementation of the peace agreements signed in 1995–96 by the government and the URNG, Guatemala is undergoing a process of fundamental police and judicial reforms. Because of the relative ambiguity of the accords governing the armed forces and police reforms ('*Acuerdo sobre el fortalecimiento del poder civil*'), uncertainty is greater about the degree of reform that can be expected. In contrast to El Salvador, as of June 1998 the great majority of personnel of the new PNC were holdovers from the armed forces and the former police force. It is still unclear to what extent Guatemala's indigenous majority will be incorporated into the PNC and to what extent the justice system and police procedures and operations will reflect the traditions and interests of this majority. As of mid-2001, over 18,000 police personnel were deployed, of whom 14% were indigenous persons and 10% were women. An inter-agency justice reform commission in May 1998 produced a plan for the reform of the judicial system, although it remains uncertain whether the government will implement these or other constitutional and legal changes to which it has agreed.

Overshadowing the process of institutional reform was a wave of violent crime that resulted in the development of organisations focused on advocacy and direct assistance. Kidnappings extended to middle-class persons, car thefts became routine, and bank robberies and murder increased significantly. Victims' family members organised NGOs (e.g. *Madres Angustiadas, Guardianes del Vecindario,* FADS) have conducted effective public campaigns decrying the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system and underscored the value of military units in recovering kidnap victims. In rural areas, as lynching of suspected criminals (usually for petty theft) climbed in number, special projects by MINUGUA and some NGOs were developed to study the phenomenon. Among NGOs, debate has focused on whether or not the military should be used in routine public order tasks, rather than on the long-term nature and development of police institutions. This 'crisis' mode has overridden medium- and long-term strategic thinking. The defeat of the constitutional amendments proposed as part of the peace agreement set back efforts to establish governing legislation for many of the agreed-upon police and justice reforms.

As regards civil society, the peace process has resulted in an influx of international assistance even though NGOs have not undergone a process of institutional capacity-building to be able to handle such resources and to execute projects as well as they might.

d) Community-level projects

Several experiments in community-based projects have commenced in recent years in Guatemala. IEPADES has community development projects and has conducted workshops on citizen security issues in those communities, and participated initially in an IIDH project. CALDH also works with communities, and has sought to assist two communities that lack any military or police presence develops municipal police forces. *Acción Ciudadana* works with municipal governments, seeking to foster citizen participation in local decision-making. It adheres to the belief that mayors must be involved in community-based experiences rather than depending exclusively upon NGOs.

In contrast to El Salvador and Honduras, the Guatemalan government has launched a program involving the formation of civil society organisations around the theme of citizen security. In 1997, the Ministry of Government initiated a program of *'Juntas Locales de Seguridad (JLS)'* whereby the ministry fostered the formation of citizen groups in conjunction with departmental governors. The JLS are comprised of *vocales* and a president, and their meetings were convened exclusively by the mayor or the governor. Citizens could attend but were limited to two-minute interventions, and the agreements of the juntas were non-binding recommendations to public officials. The functioning of the juntas varied widely.

One particular problem in Guatemala is that NGOs dealing with security issues are more divided and difficult to work with than any in the region. Political divisions dating from wartime, as well as personalities vying for the spoils of peace have led to a plethora of organisations and a habit of substandard work. Indigenous organisations require greater capacity. The current and previous governments have hired some of the most talented minds and researchers, but the transformation of government practices in violence prevention have been slow and disappointing. An assessment of community projects in violence prevention, as well as an evaluation of indigenous law (*derecho consuetudinario*) projects, would be worthwhile endeavours.

In terms of youth violence specifically, an interesting case is the approach to gangs taken by the Evangelical church. Evangelicalism is rapidly expanding throughout Central America, and the church has had some success with 'reinsertion' gang members (as has the Catholic Church). In Guatemala, for example, a number of young Evangelicals are involved in outreach work to 'convert' the gang members of their neighbourhoods. Indeed, it is at times one of the only acceptable methods of leaving a *mara*. While this is a positive outcome, the sentiment expressed by one young Guatemalan member of 'Youth for Christ' is worrying: 'God, not political movements, solves problems' (AVANCSO, 1996). What, it must be asked, is it teaching them?

Also vitally important is to offer young people an attractive alternative organisation to gangs. A successful example of this approach is given in Box 13. This is a community-based organisation for young people in a marginal urban community of Guatemala City, which is an extension of a community project run by the local catholic church. It currently works directly with about 200 young people, both Catholic and non-Catholic, offering them a safe, productive and fun place to spend their time.

Box 13 Providing an alternative organisation to gangs

The principles of '*Peronia Adolescente*', Guatemala City

Importance of teamwork: Workshops initiate, and general practice continues, a belief in the importance of working as a team. Group members gain a sense of worth, of belonging, and increased self-esteem as they realise they can make a difference.

Responsibility and ownership: The members are given a sense of agency by the participatory process by which the organisation is run. They are given ownership of their groups, and are sometimes given visible examples of the trust bestowed on them.

Regular assessment: The groups have assessment sessions at the end of every series of meetings, to allow the participants the space to discuss what they would like to improve about the running of the group, and what they feel has worked and why.

Encourage a range of activities: Space given for variety, reflecting the heterogeneity of the groups.
Community activities: They organise an annual festival in the community, as well other community activities. Many also participate in a literacy programme, voluntarily teaching every Sunday morning. These activities help members to feel part of the community, and offers them a sense of worth and achievement through actively working to change their reality.

Training: A number of workshops provide training and guidance on many issues considered important, mainly suggested by members of the group, which are important in reinforcing *group* learning and general 'consciencisation'. A sense of common knowledge and belief is thus be fostered.

Opportunities: The program operates as a process, with those successfully completing a 3 year cycle of training through the workshops etc eventually becoming salaried co-ordinators.

Committed staff: Those working directly with youth are young themselves, and come from similar communities in the city. They can therefore relate to the day to day lives and problems of the young people they work with, and they can also be trusted and respected by members of the group as role models rather than authority figures.
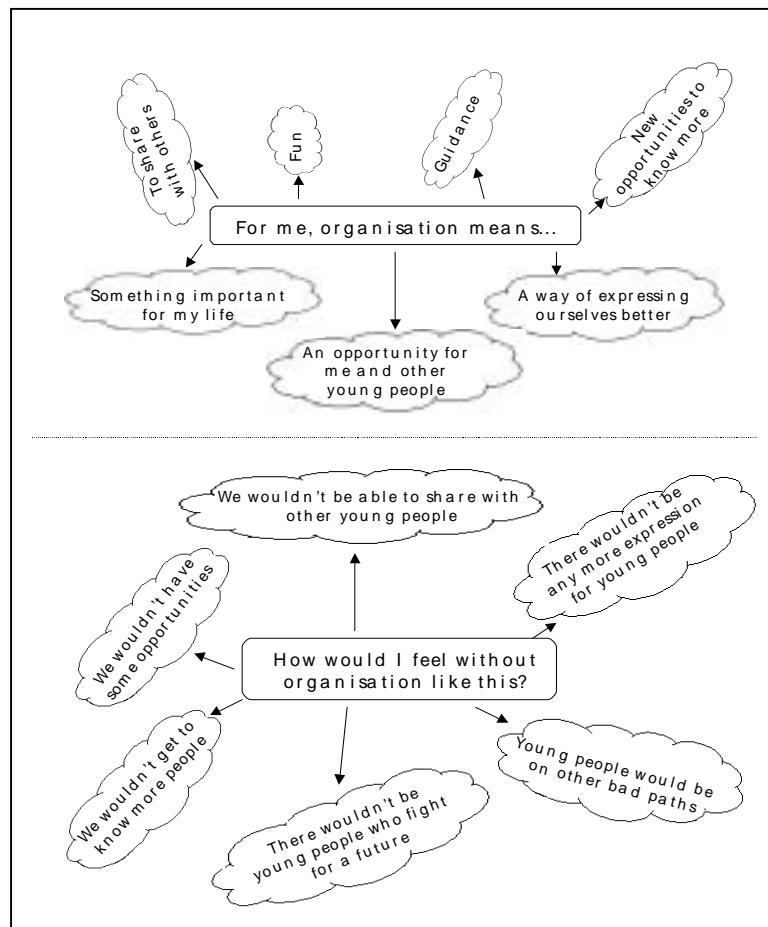
Source: Winton (forthcoming)

This organisation works on the level of both prevention and rehabilitation. It offers young people of all ages the chance to belong to a reflexive and dynamic group, and is of incalculable value to its members. The drawing in Figure 9 is by two young female members of the organisation, and shows what they value about being part of the group.

The group co-ordinators have invested a lot of time in gaining the trust and respect of many gang members in the community, and as such have managed to help some leave the *maras* and join the organisation. It is local community organisations like this which are so often the most effective in providing young people with *alternatives* to gangs, but sadly those which are generally most susceptible to failure due to lack of funds. *Peronia Adolescente* is entirely reliant upon external (international) funds (Winton, forthcoming).

In sum, therefore, while police-centred approaches to the reduction of youth gang violence may help to control levels of violence, it is unlikely to improve the situation. Successful interventions must focus on:
- Offering *substitutes* to gang membership, by recognising the multiple causes and benefits of gangs
- Offering more than gangs by giving young people the vision of a more hopeful future

Figure 9 What it means to belong to Peronia Adolescente, drawn by 2 young women, 15 and 16 years old, Guatemala City

Source: Winton (forthcoming)

Honduras

a) Advocacy

While human rights NGOs and other groups are increasing their work advocacy on citizen security and policing issues, to date there is no NGO solely dedicated to this area. In general advocacy on citizen security has occurred through the *Foro Ciudadano sobre Seguridad Pública.* In 1997 a coalition of some twenty NGOs, along with the government's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office first organised the Forum to press for the continued placement of the *Dirección de Investigación Criminal* (DIC) under the Public Ministry rather than the Ministry of Security or another ministry. It also advocated a thorough purge of the old Public Security Forces (*Fuerza de Seguridad Pública*, FUSEP, now the *Policía Nacional*, PN). The Forum met regularly starting in November 1997, organised seminars and events on public security, met with key officials and legislators on public security issues, and achieved significant press coverage and attention. It succeeded in unifying disparate human rights organisations that previously had been reticent to work together. The forum continues to be a protagonist on public security issues, although it was less active under the Flores administration and anticipates renewing its activities under the incoming government.

In addition, in 1998 the *Movimiento de Mujeres Visitación Padilla* planned to try to place observers inside police stations in the capital to advise and monitor on the treatment of victims of family violence. The *Instituto Latinoamericano de las Naciones Unidas para la Prevención del Delito y Tratamiento del Delincuente* (ILANUD) provided some training on gender issues to the PN. Women's groups such as the *Movimiento Visitación Padilla*, the *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer*, and the *Centro del Derecho de la Mujer* have carried out advocacy work on the new Domestic Violence Law in addition to their programs with victims of such violence.

b) Research

Research on violence and crime is generally limited and the number of trained academics capable of undertaking such research is small. There is little specific work on violence, and the reliability of government statistics on crime is low. Changes to the investigative police have rendered it difficult to compare statistics between recent years and prior decades, for example.

Individual researchers have established a regional profile through research on security doctrines, the military and the police of Honduras. The *Centro de Documentación de Honduras* (CEDOH) has published a number of works on citizen insecurity. Such studies have been based upon the available statistics and press reports rather than in-depth case studies of communities or interviews with different sectors. The *Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas* of the *Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras* (UNAH) has worked with ILANUD and the UNDP in studying the situation of prisons and prisoners as well as the judicial system.

There is no university-affiliated equivalent of El Salvador's IUDOP in Honduras, and public opinion polls are generally conducted by private firms. However, CEDOH conducted a UNDP study of public opinion on citizen security issues in 1995, and the *Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas (*INE) is soon to publish research on perceptions of the Honduran military. Indeed, INE research could be a key source of data in the future.

Limited research on domestic violence has been conducted. The *Movimiento de Mujeres Visitación Padilla*, for example, conducted a survey of sixty women with whom it had been working on domestic violence, but the sample was not random. As of 1998, no significant research on youth or juvenile delinquency had been completed.

c) State programmes

Unlike its three neighbours, Honduras did not experience a full-scale armed conflict during the 1980s. However, some parallels with post-conflict settings were created by the use of Honduras as an arms-transhipment point, a base and refuge for guerrillas, and as a site from which direct military (counter-insurgency) action was taken during neighbouring conflicts, in Nicaragua. During this period the military forces wielded great political influence, committing politically motivated human rights violation.

Since 1993, the Honduran government has completely dissolved the old military-controlled criminal investigative police force. It has created a new Public Ministry, a new Criminal Investigative Division (DIC) within that ministry, and has removed the main police force from the armed forces structure, renaming it the National Police (PN). In 1998 it passed a Police Organic Law creating a new Security Ministry that incorporated both the DIC and the PN. A new criminal procedure code was enacted, strengthening the role of the prosecutorial function. In contrast to El Salvador, Honduran civil society, rather than international actors or the armed opposition, has been the main protagonist of the police reform process. In the 1990s strong anti-military sentiment, shared by some private sector leaders, led the Congress to end obligatory military service, to curb military jurisdiction over certain crimes, to create a Defence Ministry and reduce the power of the armed forces high command, and to demilitarise the police forces.

d) Community level projects

Community-based violence prevention projects are generally linked to regional projects. The *Centro de Investigación, Estudio y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos* (CIEPRODH) has worked actively with the IIDH and helped develop a local *Red de Solidaridad de Villanueva* in one of the most crime-ridden barrios of the capital. In 1998–99, two communities received technical assistance and support from the University for Peace: the Olancho department and the San Francisco barrio of Tegucigalpa.

In addition, some interesting projects with youth emerged in the late 1990s including the following:

- In San Pedro Sula, the U.S. ICITAP program was instrumental in the formation of the *Comité Interinstitucional para la Prevención y Rescate de los Jóvenes en Maras* (CIPREMA). This project aims to develop work opportunities for youth in this city and involves the local police, the *Instituto Nacional de la Familia* (INFA), the Supreme Court, the prosecutor for children and juveniles, the Chamber of Commerce, and churches. The project is a government-civil society collaborative effort initiated by the government, which has arranged for a facility for meetings and some equipment for job training
- The European Union is expanding its work on juvenile violence and delinquency

Nicaragua

a) Advocacy

In contrast to El Salvador and Guatemala, Nicaragua has relatively few non-governmental advocacy programs focused upon violence prevention, citizen security issues, or police reforms. In 2000, the group *Nicaragua Nuestra* was engaged in the second two-year phase of a project called *'Diga No a la Violencia'*. Phase one included a media campaign of TV and radio advertisements calling attention to the problem of violence, including family violence. Phase two (funded by the Taiwanese government) sought to reduce violence through seminars with at-risk youth in urban barrios through training in 'a culture of peace' to some 1,200 *Policía Nacional de Nicaragua* (PNN) personnel, through education in secondary schools, and through continued community-based work (described below). The project does not constitute 'advocacy' in the sense of action directed at changing government policies, but is rather more a public education campaign accompanied by community projects and training of police agents.

Advocacy-related activities of other organisations tend to be of a more infrequent, single-event nature. Recent events include for instance:

- In September 1998, the *Centro de Estudios Estratégicos de Nicaragua* (CEEN) held a two-day National Forum on Citizen Security in Nicaragua. The forum sought to broaden debate on the issue, introducing the idea that citizen security is exclusively about eliminating crime, raising the profile of family violence and women's special security concerns, and addressing the work of the police
- In 1999, *Nicaragua Nuestra,* with University for Peace funding, held a '*Foro sobre Violencia Juvenile*' focusing on themes of family violence, juvenile crime, and violence and the media

b) Research

CRIES, based in Nicaragua, has carried out among the most significant research in Nicaragua (and perhaps regionally) on issues specifically of citizen security. In addition CEEN has conducted a research project on citizen security involving opinion surveys in Managua and focus group discussions in four rural areas. Founded in 1992 to improve civil-military relations, CEEN's activities consist of research, publications and events (seminars, training sessions, and workshops) aimed at diffusing the content of its research projects. CEEN's research project focuses on people's perceptions of the problems with the justice system and insecurity more generally. Perhaps because violent crime has only in the past few years become an issue of heightened pubic concern in Nicaragua (relative to the rest of the region), less research on violence, juvenile violence, and police reform has occurred there.

c) State programmes

The citizen security situation of Nicaragua differs in important ways from that of its three Northern neighbours. The security system was entirely revamped following the Sandinista (FSLN) victory in 1979, with a new Nicaraguan Police placed under the Ministry of the Interior. The process of demobilisation of a highly militarised security force thus occurred earlier than in other countries of the region, although the new police was comprised mainly of ex-combatants of the FSLN. The entire criminal justice system, including judicial appointments, was highly politicised, and the Ministry of the Interior played a predominant role in decisions about police policies and operations.

With the election of the Violeta Chamorro government in 1990, the PNN underwent something of an identity crisis. Under pressure from the new government and from U.S. policy pressures, the Sandinista-staffed PNN showed that it was willing to suppress Sandinista-supported demonstrations and protests, earning criticism from Sandinista sectors. Leadership changes led to the autonomy of the police force from the FSLN and to a process of professionalisation, even as the core of middle and senior-level officers and the force itself remained largely unchanged. A new Organic Police Law was negotiated over some time and passed in 1996, following which a career police officer, First Commissioner Franco Montealegre, was named Director of the police, the only career police director in the region except for then-Army Col. Flores Ponce in Honduras. Under President Arnoldo Aleman (1996–present), the process of dissociation of the police from the Sandinista party continued.

The Nicaraguan police enjoy more public and political support than any police force in the region except perhaps for Costa Rica. As its harshest human rights critic, Vilma Nuñez of the *Centro de Derechos*

Humanos de Nicaragua (CENIDH) commented in 1998, 'despite our criticisms, I think this police is the least repressive in Latin America'. However, reduction in the size and budget of the PNN in the 1990s eroded its operational capacity, with force level dropped from 7000 in 1993 to 6200 in 1998. Police salaries fell from 1995 to 1997, but increased to approximately US$96/month for 1998.

While crime has risen in both perception and reality, levels of homicide and violent crime in general are not as high as in El Salvador or Guatemala, with a common perception that the police have used a firm hand to keep crime in check. The combination of concerns about criminal violence with the scarcity of resources for the police has led to two important outcomes:

- A wide range of political sectors favour increasing resources allocated to the police. This includes human rights groups, opposition parties, and the media
- The lack of police presence in a fifth of the country's 146 municipalities led the PNN to embark on a program of 'Volunteer Police' in these areas, reportedly with significant community consultation. Although a purported requirement of community policing is a well-financed police organisation to support police officers' deployment in the field, the PNN experience, among the most extensive in Central America as of 1998, ironically grew out of a scarcity of resources

The dire poverty of the country, especially in the continued aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, makes material needs a priority for all sectors, including security and justice. Low-cost methods of policing have prevailed, and high-tech programs make little sense. Judicial reforms have not proceeded to the extent that they have elsewhere in the region, and inefficiency persists. Efforts to incorporate women into the National Police and promote them to senior posts are far more advanced than anywhere in the region, and can serve as something of a model. Here again, state institutions merit strengthening, and funding NGOs to foster new attitudes among state officials is less necessary than in neighbouring countries. The reform of education after the Sandinista victory helped make the education system more open and flexible, perhaps offering opportunities for fostering violence prevention programs in the mainstream educational system.

d) Community level projects

In addition to the community projects carried out within the context of the IIDH and University for Peace projects described elsewhere, several disparate community-based projects are underway in Nicaragua. As mentioned above perhaps the most significant is the community police method/program of the PNN itself. Driven by scarcity of funds, the decline in numbers of police agents and a decline in popular levels of confidence, the PNN in the late-1990s developed a two-fold community policing approach (see Box 14).

Box 14 Community consultation in the Nicaraguan community-policing programme

The PNN appointed a single Sector Chief from among its ranks for each of the 600 sectors in the country, with responsibility to convene and consult community leaders of his/her choosing regarding security problems. In urban areas, this consultative process has involved the formation of Crime Committees attended to by PNN 'Mobile Neighbourhood Crime Units'.

In both urban and rural areas, communities were also asked to help support volunteer police agents or 'vigilantes' (volunteer police date from the 1980s). The police generally selected candidates, based on their knowledge and on availability. The PNN asks the assembled community if they approve or disapprove of each candidate for volunteer police agent. In Managua these processes commenced in early 1998, with 3 to 5 volunteer police in each of the most crime-ridden sectors. In rural areas, the programs operates in similar manner, but also have 'support committees' which support the volunteer police with food and in-kind contribution or in some cases voluntary taxes (e.g. in one community milk-producers agreed to contribute 1 córdoba per bottle of milk). There were 58 police posts operating in 1998 with 2,669 police volunteers.

NGOs also have had community-based security projects, some were associated with the IIDH and University of Peace projects. *Nicaragua Nuestra* also had a community-based program as part of phase II of its '*Diga No a la Violencia*' program. Growing out of its seminars with the PNN in especially crime-ridden sectors of the capital, *Nicaragua Nuestra* helped form 23 seven-member *juntas de vecinos* in Districts 3 and 5, which meet one night weekly with PNN and other government representatives. At those meetings, citizens

communicate their needs and problems to the government representatives, and afterward meet individually with police agents to pass along tips, complaints of police abuse, and other information.

In addition to its more traditional human rights casework, CENIDH had a small citizen security program focused on juvenile violence and offenders in a few barrios of Managua plus Matagalpa (one of the most violent departments) and Estelí. CENIDH worked with a small number of families through their regional offices in these sites, trying to improve parental-youth communication and visiting police stations to see if any of the participating youth have been arrested and providing assistance to them. Other organisations, including *Puntos de Encuentro,* had programs on juvenile violence in communities.

One organisation worked in an unusual fashion in local-level conflict resolution. The *Consejo de Iglesias Pro-Alianza Denominacional* (CEPAD), built a network of community organisations which enjoys a high degree of legitimacy and self-sustainability. CEPAD began a series of local Peace Commissions in the countryside during the war, and these continued with varying degrees of institutionalisation in several regions of the countryside. In 1998 there were approximately 220 Peace Commissions, mostly in rural areas where the state is absent. Commissioners are selected by the community and are often protestant pastors or Catholic delegates of the word (lay assistants). These peace commissions were mainly erected to resolve violent conflicts between political factions and different demobilised groups during and after the war. However, because of the absence of state presence, the commissioners continued to serve in volunteer capacity as informal mediators of conflicts of various sorts. As informal authority figures, commissioners also engage in dialogue with army and police officials about particular human rights cases and have made suggestions and complaints about particular police agents.

Table 15 Provisional matrix for mapping violence reduction interventions by sector, type and level

INTERVENTION : SECTOR	INTERVENTION: TYPE	LEVEL OF INTERVENTION		
		Regional	National	Local
Judicial Reform	*Advocacy*			
	Research			
	State Programs			
	Community Projects			
Police Reform / Citizen Security	*			
Family Violence	*			
Youth Violence	*			
Human Rights	*			
Community Transform./ Conflict Res.	*			

* = Similar types of interventions to those identified for Judicial Reform