

*Initiative "one book in one snapshot"*

**Title of the book/paper :** Citizen Security. Conceptual Framework and Empirical Evidence.

**Author :**

Beatriz Abizanda, Joan Serra Hoffman, Lina Marmolejo, Suzanne Duryea (Inter-American Development Bank Discussion Paper)

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**Summary (maximum 2 pages)**

Lack of security is one of the main concerns in the Latin American region and the major obstacle impeding these states from growing. Although there are significant improvements and homicide rates decreased in many countries, the problem is still a main thread in many local communities in the region. One of the lines of intervention is crime and violence prevention. International donors have been supporting governments in this approach by financing different activities on a national and local level. The Conceptual Framework elaborated by the experts from the Inter-American Development Bank is a tool to guide the analyses of the sector, drawing from an expanding empirical knowledge base of "what works" in crime and violence prevention. There is a growing consensus that solid evidence is a critical input to guide decisions about policy funding and implementation.

Factors influencing security matter at the individual and characteristics at the community level include among others: the concentration of the urban poor, family disruption, housing and population density, criminal opportunity structures (levels of leisure activities, gang density) and dimensions of social organization (informal social ties, density of acquaintanceship, supervision of street groups). Such conditions require integrated, comprehensive and coordinated action in several sectors. Fear of crime is a key "quality of life" issue. It is not explicitly correlated with actual crime and it cannot be assumed that policies to reduce crime will reduce fear of crime. Therefore, regional citizen security policies must address three key dimensions: violence, crime and fear of crime.

The main common challenges in the region are constraints in the capacity of human resources, lack of expertise and long-term approach toward the issue. Policymakers are beginning to shift away from single-sector interventions toward addressing the problem of

crime and violence in multiple dimensions. Institutional fragility of the states in Latin America and the Caribbean and the weakness of democratic governance constitute fertile ground for a surge in crime and violence. Many countries characterize with weak public institutions and low capacity to deliver change. Additionally, there are rather low trust levels in police and judiciary bodies as a consequence of corruption and organized crime that erode the legitimacy of the state and often lead to impunity. There is weak coordination between central and local governments and no clear division of responsibilities among different authorities. Crime and violence activities are not present in the same extent in various regions therefore local municipalities should develop programmes adjusted to their conditions, but they tend to be weaker than central governments. Public officials are not specialized in specific niches because of lack of adequate training. There is no 'culture of evaluation' in countries of the region. They do not use monitoring and evaluation tools, lack data and statistics on crime and therefore perform diagnostic assessments in an ineffective manner. Weakness of criminal justice system results with overcrowded prisons which generate obstacles for the rehabilitative role of the penal system. Overpopulation in turn is mainly the outcome of excessive use of preventive imprisonment which is caused by delays in trials, lack of alternative sentencing systems and lack of pre-trial services.

The experts from the Inter-American Development Bank underline five areas of crime and violence prevention activities and evidence-based examples (social intervention, situational prevention, police, judiciary system and penitentiary system) which should be developed in line with cross-cutting issues of increasing policymaking capacities and promoting the use of empirical evidence in policies.

**Social intervention** aims at addressing criminal behaviour among the youth and reducing exposure to the opportunities of risky behaviour. It might be implemented through effective supervision, specialized programmes e.g. drug substitution programmes, counselling, skills training, family therapy and legal assistance or cash transfers among others. It is important to note that reducing risky behaviour through “scare tactics” has tended to be ineffective and at times counterproductive. Scare tactics typically involve sharing shocking information via ex-drug addicts and convicted felons, among others.

On the other side, **situational prevention** reduces environmental factors that influence criminal behaviour. Reducing opportunities for crime is achieved essentially through some modification or manipulation of the physical environment in order to directly affect the offender's perceptions of increased risks and effort, and decreased rewards, provocations and excuses.

**Police activities** have been assumed to be of a reactive approach in response and to control crime and violent acts. However, new methodologies show that detecting potential opportunities for offenses and deterring those from occurring can result with effective preventive policing activities. One of the methods is diverting offenders from prosecution to alternative mechanisms, e.g. preventive education or community service work. Unfortunately, in Latin American region the police do not have the capacity, legal authority or institutional alternatives to divert suspects from formal prosecution. Moreover, more

police does not mean increased effectiveness and additional units must be deployed to target specific risks. That is why problem-oriented policing units (POP) dealing with clusters of similar incidents create the capacity and ability of the police to identify and deal with the causes of specific patterns of crime. Targeting hot spots approach is another way to conduct preventive activities by interventions in places of high volume of crime which show more effectiveness than random and reactive police patrol. Latin American region needs a long-term comprehensive reform, especially in countries where police structures are weak and corrupted. In order to address these issues leadership and modern training are necessary as well as effective internal and external control mechanisms and an operative system of command and control.

Although **judiciary system** focuses on those who are already involved in crime and on the other hand prevention aims at intervening before, there are programs in a judicial framework focusing on reducing the criminal activities of offenders. One of the methods is the use of alternative mechanisms like restorative justice which focuses on the needs of the victims and the offenders instead of satisfying abstract legal principles or simply punishing the offender. Restorative justice conferences are face-to-face meetings between offenders, their victims, and their respective families, after the offender has accepted responsibility for having harmed the victim. Moreover different kinds of offenders require different kinds of sentencing and juvenile criminals should be isolated from formal prosecution. Research shows effectiveness of non-custodial sentences for minor offenses. Those may include treatment programmes, vocational education trainings or community employment programmes.

**Penitentiary system** consists of preventive and rehabilitation interventions which aim at decreasing recidivism and improving re-entering of offenders into society. One of the methods is the cognitive behavioural therapy which involves cognitive skills training, anger management and different components related to social skills and moral development of offenders. Drug treatment in prisons and boot (correctional) camps for young offenders also showed increased effectiveness in decreasing criminal behaviours in comparison to traditional prison regimes.

<b>Takeaway messages for DG DEVCO (maximum 1 page)</b>
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Although all of the above mentioned methods showed better results in crime and violence prevention than traditional systems, one has to bear in mind that they are based on evidence mostly from countries like the United States and Canada which represent very different conditions and institutional capacities than Latin American region. Nevertheless they can serve as guidelines and recommendations for international donors and local authorities implementing citizen security policies. Institutional transformation is crucial in order to provide effective crime prevention through establishing legitimate and accountable institutions in the region. Engagement of local governments in design and implementation of policies, establishment of mechanisms to facilitate inter-agency communication and

coordination for joint decision making, unified assessment and shared information systems are key components of a multi-sectoral approach for a response to crime and violence.

The IDB Conceptual Framework highlights five key elements which lay the base for national evidence-based violence prevention in low- and middle-income countries:

- ✓ Creation of national action plan and identifying a leading agency;
- ✓ Data collection;
- ✓ Collaboration and exchange of information;
- ✓ Implementation and evaluation of specific preventive actions;
- ✓ Providing care and support systems for victims.

It is crucial to increase knowledge about evidence-based policy for crime and violence priorities in the region, invest in capacity building, conduct strong evaluations of promising interventions in the region, and build institutional capacities for firm citizen security policy formulation and implementation. The report indicates four areas of activities which have to be undertaken in order for the comprehensive plan for violence prevention to move forward in low- and middle-income countries. These are: strong leadership and multi-sectoral coalitions at national and local levels; research and data collection for guiding the interventions and monitoring progress; capacity building to create know-how and strengthening human resources to implement, manage, and evaluate citizen security policies, and dissemination of information on evidence-based prevention and successful preventive projects.

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