CHILDREN TRAPPED IN FRAGILE CITIES: COMMUNITIES, ORGANISED CRIME, AND THE RULE OF LAW

Juan Carlos Garzón-Vergara
Woodrow Wilson Center, USA; Ideas for Peace Foundation, Colombia
Suggested Citation:

BACKGROUND PAPER

CHILDREN TRAPPED IN FRAGILE CITIES:
COMMUNITIES, ORGANISED CRIME, AND THE RULE OF LAW

Juan Carlos Garzón-Vergara
Woodrow Wilson Center, USA; Ideas for Peace Foundation, Columbia
Abstract

This chapter proposes an analytical framework to understand how the lack of state capacity and the breakdown of the social capital interact to provide a fertile ground for the influence of criminal organisations and increase the risk on children and youth. With this goal the text analyses the connections between institutional weakness and the erosion of social capital as push factors, and the benefits of joining a criminal faction as pull factors. The main contribution of this approach is the depiction of the “competitive advantage of organised crime and gangs”. Based on this framework this chapter identifies a basket of 13 indicators and 34 variables to measure the main concepts and undertakes a review of the community level interventions implemented in Latin America. The lack of systematic information and evaluations about the interventions makes it difficult to identify effective strategies. However, there is an opportunity to fill this gap using different methodological tools and new ways to collect the information.

Keywords: Organised crime, social capital, risk on children, fragile cities.
Introduction

The Global South has experienced the effects of rapid urbanisation, with important impacts on safety and development of children. In less than 40 years, a third of the world’s population will be living in cities, and 90 percent of population growth will be concentrated in urban areas (Macaluso and Briscoe, 2015). The Latin America-Caribbean region has an increasing proportion of the world’s largest and fastest-growing cities (Satterhwaite, 2007).

According to UNICEF, children (defined as person below the age of 18) are increasingly concentrated in urban regions. While in 1955, 27 percent of all children lived in urban areas, in 2005 this figure increased to 43 percent. Currently, more than half of the total child population lives in cities (UNICEF, 2012). Urban life offers advantages for many children, but for many of them the city is an insecure and risky place, especially for those who live in impoverished urban neighbourhoods and informal settlements. As UNICEF states, children are among the most vulnerable members of these communities and suffer disproportionally from poverty and inequality (UNICEF, 2012).

Rapid urbanisation challenges the limited capacities of states, exposing their fragility, what R. Muggah described with the concept “fragile cities” (Muggah, 2016). As more people migrate to cities, the capacity of their governments to deliver services, provide security, and govern effectively will be pushed to the brink (Muggah, 2012; de Boer, 2015). Given this reality, in many cases rapid urbanisation can lead to the deterioration of social, economic, and security conditions.

Access to a fair and responsive justice system is particularly problematic in highly-burdened and fragile cities. As Norton affirms, in these places the state has lost, or never had, a monopoly of force, and the social contract between the government and its citizens is broken (Norton, 2003). In many cities, the combination of a dysfunctional justice system with the unpreparedness of public officials for rapid urban expansion has led communities to cooperate with informal or criminal actors, who, at many times, effectively control territory. (Macaluso and Brisco, de Boer, 2015).

These conditions can provide a fertile ground for the expansion of criminal organisations and gangs engaged in local violence and crime. Militias, street gangs, pandillas and maras, drug dealers, vigilantes, and also paramilitary groups are part of the everyday life of many communities, imposing social norms and controlling the activities of the local residents (Beall et.al, 2010). In some cases, these organisations replace the state, providing governance and fragile stability based on authoritarian practices. Given this reality, many urban areas have deteriorated into “no-go zones” that, according to the World Bank, trap the poorest population in a dangerous cycle of poverty and violence (World Bank, 2010).

These extreme situations do not affect cities everywhere. The relationship between urban growth, violence, and crime is still under discussion and in many cases remains unclear. In the case of Latin
America, the role of urbanisation in the deterioration of security is fertile ground for debate. In this region, the UNDP (2013) found that most countries that had an annual urban population growth above two percent also had an increase in homicide rates. At the same time, of the world’s fifty most violent cities, all but eight are to be found in Latin America and the Caribbean (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública Y Justicia Penal, 2015). In the context of general trends, we should also note that the impacts of violence and crime do not affect entire cities and groups in a uniform manner.

Children and youth are among the most vulnerable groups, taking into account the rapid accumulation of risk factors in the neighbourhoods where they live. A substantial body of literature supports the notion that the exposure of children to violence and crime, and their involvement in organised groups and gangs, result from a complex interplay of risk factors at the community, family, school, and individual level. Communities are an important influence on their families and peer groups, and children may be exposed to situations that lead to violence (Cunningham et al., 2008).

Community risk factors include poverty, social exclusion, lack of education, and instability of residential neighbourhoods; also important are community norms, such as distrust of authorities, and a collective sense of inefficacy. Informal social control can exercise important influence on the behavior of children and youth, providing a set of socially acceptable norms for peaceful coexistence and capacities to prevent dangerous criminal conduct (Coulton et al., 1996; Sampson et al., 1999). This sort of control is an aspect of social capital, understood as the shared norms, networks, solidarity and social trust that encourage cooperation for the common good (Lederman, Loayza and Menéndez, 2002; Guerra, 2005).

In the context of fragile cities, social capital is typically eroded and informal social control is weakened and replaced by relations dominated by fear and mistrust. This in turn has an important impact on the safety of children and youth and their exposure to organised criminal violence. We have in effect a negative cycle: Low levels of social capital promote crime and violence, and violence and crime in turn contribute to further erosion of social capital (Moser and Holland, 1997; Guerra, 2005).

From this perspective, the risk of violence and crime and the involvement of children and youth in criminal organisations are linked to the structural dynamics of urban sprawl (Muggah, 2013), the inadequate presence of the state, especially the weak justice systems, and the erosion of social capital in the communities. Organised crime and gangs take advantage of these vulnerabilities to strengthen their political and social authority and to consolidate their economic hold (Muggah, 2012; Rodgers, 2006).

We need to understand the interactions between the state, the community, and organised crime in order to design effective interventions that can reduce risk factors and improve community resilience. The central argument of the chapter is that policy interventions should be integrated and sequenced to produce desired effects at the specific neighbourhood level; an obstacle, however, is that most
programmes aim to reduce crime and violence that affect children and youth are not systematically evaluated. Thus, we don’t know what combinations of policies can be most effective on a cost-benefit basis.

Section one of the chapter proposes an analytical framework based on three concepts: institutional weakness, erosion of social capital, and competitive advantage of organised crime and gangs. The goal is to explain, based on the available evidence, how the lack of state capacity and the breakdown of the social capital interact to provide a fertile ground for the influence of criminal organisations and increase the risk on children and youth. Section two proposes a basket of indicators to measure the concepts proposed in the analytical framework and reviews the availability of data and quantitative information in Latin America. The third section undertakes a review of the community level interventions implemented in Latin America, identifying local efforts that have positive outcomes in preventing or containing youth violence and the influence of organised crime. The final section discusses the main findings, the remaining questions, and some policy implications.

**Institutions, Social Capital, and Illegal Actors**

The aim of the analytical framework is to understand how weak state capacity and the breakdown of the social capital interact, in the context of fragile cities, to provide a fertile ground for the influence of criminal organisations and increase the risk for children and youth. The main components of the framework are: 1) institutional weakness, 2) erosion of social capital (to include the breakdown of informal control) and 3) competitive advantage for organised crime and gangs (Figure 1). We should underline the complexity of child and youth violence and the crime problem. There is no single factor that explains or predicts the risk of violence or victimisation (OECD, 2011). The dynamics depend on multi-level influences that are part of a larger system shaped by individual features and interpersonal relationships (Guerra, 2005).

This framework focusses on the community level and the influence of state institutions – especially weak law enforcement - and illegal actors. We should also recognise that in fragile cities, conflicts and violence are neither inevitable nor linear and can affect different places differently (Moser and McIlwaine, 2014; Muggah, 2014).
Institutional Weakness

The root causes of urban insecurity are linked to the lack of state institutional capacity to deliver public goods and services, especially justice and security. In Latin America this situation is reflected in high levels of violence and crime, notorious levels of impunity, and the feeling of mistrust that citizens harbour regarding the institutions of justice and police (UNDP, 2013). As John de Boer highlights, analysing the features of fragile cities, a major factor shaping violence is the inability of governments at all levels to respond appropriately: “In some cities, systems of law and order, ranging from the police, judiciary, penal systems, and other forms of legal enforcement, are dysfunctional and considered illegitimate by the citizens they are intended to serve” (de Boer, 2015). The result is a broken system, one in which fragile institutions adopt policies that do not provide protection to communities, but rather reinforce the dynamics of crime, violence, and corruption (Bailey, 2014; Garzón, 2014).

In marginal communities, law enforcement is targeted disproportionately on poor youth, perceived by the authorities to be “dangerous” (Loftus, 2009). This pattern responds to the image of children and youth as one of the main problems of public order (Shaw, 2007; Caldeira, 2000). But such discrimination does not affect all youth in the same way, as it depends on the neighbourhoods where they live. As Beall et al. (2010) state, in these places, law enforcement rarely operates on behalf of the most disadvantaged communities, and the urban poor typically fear the police rather than rely on them for protection. In large areas of fragile cities police forces create their own systems of values and behavioural codes, guided by racist attitudes, brutality, and impunity (Macaluso and Briscoe, 2015). Given this reality, the challenge is not only the absence of the state but also the influence of
networks of collusion between corrupted officials and criminal organisations (Arias, 2006; Garay and Sancello-Albarán, 2013).

In countries like Brazil, various studies indicate that the police were among the principal perpetrators of violence and abuse against young people (de Souza Minayo, 1999; Ramos, 2006). Aggressive policing negatively impacts citizen views of the police in terms of effectiveness, perceived fairness, and legitimacy (Tyler et al., 2014). The sense that justice depends on socioeconomic class and dissatisfaction with the police are important factors to understand the emergence of a culture of violence among youth (Noronha et al., 1999; San Juan, 1998).

**Erosion of Social Capital**

Violence and crime, gangs, and criminal organisations proliferate in places where established order has broken down and where alternative forms of shared cultural behaviour are lacking (Hoffman et al., 2011). Different studies have found a strong relationship between the destruction of social capital, low social cohesion, and high levels of interpersonal mistrust and violence, especially among young people (Kawachi and Kennedy, Lederman et al., 1999; Moser and Holland, 1997; De León Beltrán and Velasquez, 2012). In the context of fragile cities, social capital can be affected by multiple factors linked with the process of rapid urbanisation: unemployment, inequality, poverty and low social mobility (Sorj and Tirony, 1997; OECD, 1997).

Rates of violence are not solely a function of economic development but also reflect different cultural norms about the acceptability of violence (Guerra, 2005). As Nancy Guerra states, in some neighbourhoods violence becomes a normative currency for social interaction (Guerra, 2005). In settings where violence is tolerated, children grow up to see it as an acceptable response in daily life circumstances (Orpinas, 1999; Cunningham et al., 2008). In the case of boys and young men, masculinity – “being male” – bolsters the idea of the legitimate use of violence to earn respect (McAlister, 1998; Baird, 2012).

A similar dynamic occurs with the normalisation of illegal activities and the influence of criminal organisations and gangs. Members of these groups are seen as role models for children and youth and appear as “legitimate” social actors operating in a parallel legal system, imparting justice, and often restricting the activities and movements of local residents (Dowdney, 2005; UN-Habitat, 2007; Muggah, 2013). Various studies also show that fear of crime impacts the behaviour of people, constraining their social and territorial mobility (Fischman and Mesh, 1996; Vilalta, 2014). As Macaluso and Briscoe state, under these circumstances attributing legitimacy to illegal and criminal actors is controversial: “While their role is recognized and their authority respected by some, they consolidate their control over society through a narrative of fear and intimidation, where violence is the cornerstone of the new order” (2015).
In these communities a system of complicity emerges in which the law of silence prevails. People perceive police raids as a threat to their own security and a disturbance to the existing criminal order (Leeds, 1996; Rodgers, 2006; Hume, 2008; Misse, 2010; Adams, 2012). In the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, for example, this is what is called la lei del morro, a parallel order based on informal rules imposed by drug traffickers (Cano, 2012).

**Competitive Advantages of Organised Crime and Gangs**

General consensus is lacking on how to define organised crime and youth gangs. There are pithy terms that many politicians and the broader public cite as one of the main reasons for the deterioration of security (Hauck and Peterke, 2010). The organisations that fit in these categories vary from small, loosely connected networks, involving few persons, to large and hierarchical organisations (Williams, 2001). To add to this complexity, one of the major issues in Latin America is the widespread conflation of organised crime and gangs. As Denis Rodgers and Adam Baird state: “Although there is no doubt that there are links between gangs, drug-trafficking and organized crime, these are by no means preordained, and the connection is more often assumed rather than demonstrated” (2015).

Apart from debates about gangs and organised crime, some authors compare what happens in some cities with a war scenario, where hostile non-state actors confront authorities and dispute the control over territory (Norton, 2003). The introduction of terms such as “urban wars” and “slum wars” (Beall, 2007; Rodgers, 2007) influence the attention of security and humanitarian actors (Muggah, 2013). In Brazil, for example, the project “Children in Organized Armed Violence” emerged, to distinguish children and teenagers that participate in armed gangs in non-war settings from the other internationally recognised group of child soldiers (Dowdney, 2002). Most of the former types of gangs are principally involved in small-scale, localised crime and delinquency, such as muggings and petty theft (Jütersonke et al., 2009), and do not fit with the image of a structured criminal organisation.

The analytical framework sketched above does not attempt to solve this conceptual muddle but rather identifies some of the competitive advantages that non-state actors have in fragile cities. The absence or weakness of the state leaves “governance voids” that criminal organisations and gangs fill, providing illegal goods and services to certain communities (O’Donnell, 1993; Kruijt and Koonings, 1999). It is the weak state capacity to enforce the law ethically and competently that gives the advantage to criminal actors (Felbab-Brown, 2011).

The relationship between the state and crime can be understood from two perspectives: the rise of crime in areas of state weakness, and the rise of crime in partnership with state agents (Garzón, 2012). In the latter scenario, the collusion with corrupt officials can give gangs a “degree of localized power to fend off state agents trying to repress crime” (Arias, 2006; Rodgers and Baird, 2015)
In the context of fragile cities, criminal organisations and gangs not only take advantage of the erosion of formal law enforcement but also the fragmentation of social capital and the concentration of economic vulnerabilities. Figure 2 depicts the connection between institutional weakness and the erosion of social capital (as push factors) and the “benefits” of joining a criminal faction (as pull factors). The set of factors and risks included in this analytical framework focuses on the community level. This must be complemented with personal characteristics at the individual level, along with the external influences that encourage young people to join a criminal group or a gang, for example, the involvement of friends or family (Dowdney, 2002).

**Figure 2. Community push factors and criminal organisations and gangs pull factors**

Despite adverse conditions, most of the children and youth in vulnerable communities do not become involved in criminal groups or activities. According to the evidence available, up to 15 percent of youth within gang-affected communities can end up joining gangs (ERIC et al., 2001; Rodgers, 2006a). On the other hand, Jüteronke et al. point to studies that indicate that on average the figure is somewhere in the range of 3-5 percent (2009). The problem is that even though gangs represent a small portion of the adolescent population, they commit a significant proportion of youth violence and crime (Guerra, 2005). It is also important to recognise that many children coexist with criminal factions and gangs without direct involvement (Gueraldi, 2011).
Regarding the interaction between push and pull factors, criminal organisations and gangs must be understood not only from the “incentives” perspective but also as a push factor. Criminal groups are interested in recruiting children, using all means available, including threats and violence against their families. For these organisations, children offer many low-cost advantages: they are easily manipulated, enjoy legal benefits (e.g., reduced jail terms) and attract less law enforcement attention than adults (COHA, 2015; Dowdney, 2002). The recent crisis on the U.S.-Mexican border with thousands of boys and girls, reflects the impacts of the pressure of street gangs and organised crime on communities in parts of Central America. While this is not the only factor that explains the tragedy of the unaccompanied children, the dynamic of violence and crime constitutes one of the main causes of forced displacements of children (UNHCR, 2014).

Another factor that deserves special attention in Latin America is the unregulated availability of weapons. According to the OECD (2011), young people are living in environments in which firearms are cheap, poorly regulated, widely available, and often traded illicitly. These weapons are easy for youth to carry and use. This ready availability is an important trigger for violence. According to the OAS Report on Citizen Security in the Americas 2010, 78 percent of homicides in Central America and 83 percent in South America are committed with firearms (OAS, 2012). Again, this problem must be understood from both the weakness of the state’s regulatory capacity and also from weak informal social control view.

According to the proposed framework, violence against children and youth is embedded in the inadequate (or collusive) presence of the state and weak justice system and the erosion of social capital, this in a context of scarcity of legal economic opportunities. This set of vulnerabilities provides competitive advantages to criminal organisations and gangs and increases the community-risk factors. To design and implement effective and sustainable interventions to respond to these challenges we need to move from anecdotal and superficial analysis to data-oriented approaches, taking advantage of the available tools and innovative data collection methods (Moestue et al., 2012).

**Reviewing Tools and Data: A Preliminary Discussion**

The aim of this section is to identify a set of variables and metrics to measure the concepts proposed in the analytical framework. The scope of this exercise is limited, given the partial and fragmented information available about these topics in Latin America, particularly with respect to the local level. An essential first step to design better policies is to improve the quality of the local-level data.

The following matrix identifies a basket of indicators linked to the analytical framework proposed above (Table 1). The definition of each of the variables is accompanied by examples of tools to gather the information and the rationale behind their selection. A relevant caveat of this review is that most of the available tools have been implemented at the national level and the Metropolitan areas, with important methodological implications and limitations. The community level requires a
micro-level approach (commune/neighbourhood) that can inform programme development and provide useful data for its evaluation.

The selection criteria for the variables take into account their inclusion in previous surveys done in Latin America, the feasibility of the information collection method, and the availability of resources. The list of indicators serves as a menu and does not attempt to propose a comprehensive index at this stage.
### Table 1. Matrix of community push factors and criminal organisations and gangs pull factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>TOOLS</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Weakness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Effectiveness</td>
<td>Basic Security</td>
<td>Homicides rate per 100,000 population</td>
<td>Homicide data and official crime statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reported robberies per 100,000 population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Security</td>
<td>Homicide rate for children per 100,000</td>
<td>Official statistics</td>
<td>Institutional effectiveness affected the real and the perceived security in communities. A high level of violence and crime impact citizen views of the state in terms of the authority and legitimacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>population</td>
<td>Health information system – Hospital emergency department information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ER admissions rate due to assaults in children</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of children officially reported as victims of violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of security in the neighbourhood</td>
<td>Feel safe in neighbourhood/locality</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction with police performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceive a risk of victimisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional corruption</strong></td>
<td>Perception that legal system or judiciary is affected by corruption</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td>Corruption erodes belief in the institutions and reduces interpersonal trust (Seligson, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception that police is affected by corruption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception that police participate in criminal activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Levels of trust in the authorities</strong></td>
<td>Confidence in the police</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td>Trust links ordinary citizens to the institutions that are intended to represent them. The impact of crime on trust can perpetuate a vicious cycle of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence in the justice system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk of being arrested or mistreated by police for no apparent reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poor cooperation and weak institutions (Corbacho et al., 2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential mobility</th>
<th>Inhabitants who had lived in another state in the past 5 years.</th>
<th>Household survey</th>
<th>Families that move tend to be less successful at developing social ties (Pettit and McLanahan, 2003).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family member emigrated</td>
<td>Household survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social equality</td>
<td>Grade retention in primary school</td>
<td>Education statistics</td>
<td>The effect of the growing gap between the rich and poor is reflected in diminished social capital, and decreased social capital is in turn associated with increased violence and crime (Kennedy, 1998). Citizens' economic, political, and social insecurities are important determinants of their fear of crime (Dammert, 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived fairness of income distribution</td>
<td>Household survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intergenerational social mobility expectations</td>
<td>Household survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community participation</td>
<td>Community is organised to prevent crime</td>
<td>Victimisation and Public Security Perception Survey</td>
<td>Violence and crime can energise communities or lead to withdrawal from community life (Susan and Gary, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in community activities</td>
<td>Household survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Interpersonal trust within the immediate community</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td>People who are victims of a crime or have high levels of perceived insecurity have higher levels of distrust (Seligson Ed. 2008, Núñez et al., 2012; Olavarria-Gambi y Allende, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards violence</td>
<td>Adults’ attitudes towards violence against children</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey Schools survey</td>
<td>Where violence is tolerated, children grow up to see it is an acceptable response in daily life circumstances (Orpinas, 1999; Cunningham et al., 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adults’ attitudes towards use of violence as a sign of respect</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willingness of the population to possess weapons for self defense</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs and drugs as a risk factors</td>
<td>Reported sale of illegal drugs Prevalence of drug use among Secondary School Students</td>
<td>Victimisation and public security perception survey Survey/Secondary school students</td>
<td>The presence of gangs, guns and drugs in a locality is a volatile mixture, increasing the likelihood of violence (Bevan and Florquin, 2006; Hoffman et.al., 2010). The growth in gang membership correlates with easy access to drugs and small arms (Cunningham et al., 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to weapons</td>
<td>Victimisation and Public Security Perception Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability of children to violence</td>
<td>Proportion of children who say they have feelings of “fear”, “anger” and/or “revenge” as a result of violence</td>
<td>Survey of school-aged children</td>
<td>Gang activity is linked to increased levels of school violence in some communities (Currie, 1998; Thompkins, 2000). Several studies show that childhood aggression is a good predictor of violence in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of children who skipped school because they were afraid / felt unsafe to go to school.</td>
<td>Household survey/ Survey of school-aged children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s exposure to gangs and criminal organisations</td>
<td>Proportion of children, who have indicated via self-reports that they have been victims of violence at home/school.</td>
<td>Survey of school-aged children</td>
<td>adolescence and early adulthood (WHO, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children affected by organised crime</td>
<td>Gang/Criminal group membership</td>
<td>Survey of school-aged children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen that reported that organised crime or gang are the main threat for their safety.</td>
<td>Children affected by organised crime</td>
<td>Survey of school-aged children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youths gangs or criminal factions hanging out on the streets</td>
<td>Gang/Criminal group membership</td>
<td>Victimization and Public Security Perception Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general terms, information in Latin America about the selected variables is very limited, especially the data focused on children and youth. Official records of crime incidence are fragmented and focused on the most serious types of crimes. The level of reporting by citizens is low, given their distrust of state institutions. Increasing numbers of countries and cities are using victimisation surveys, but their application is sporadic and the methodologies vary greatly from one place to another. Regional surveys, such as Latinobarómetro and Vanderbilt University’s Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), include some questions about security, victimisation, and social capital, but their approach is broad and focuses on the national level (Dammert et al., 2010).

With respect to social capital, the “Latin American Survey of Social Cohesion” (Ecosocial is the acronym in Spanish) offers a comparative approach; the survey is applied in seven countries and 39 cities. Nevertheless, its approach is too broad for our purposes and does not offer the necessary information to analyse the local level. In Mexico, the Ministry of Interior and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography developed the National Survey on Social Cohesion and Crime Prevention 2014, a good example of how to integrate these two dimensions. The aim of the survey was to identify the people that present the greater number of risk factors in their lives as well as those communities that have higher levels of disorganisation. The target population was young people between 12 to 29 years old and householders. At the local level, also in Mexico, the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE is the Spanish acronym) developed the Survey on Social, Economic and Cultural Reality of Violence and Local Crime, used by some cities and states to develop policies for prevention and control.

LAPOP’s recent report, “Impact Evaluation of USAID’s Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention,” based on multiyear evaluations of policy interventions, offers a useful battery of questions focused on programmes for at-risk youth. This evaluation provides a scientifically rigorous tool to measure the impact of crime prevention programmes in Central America, taking into account the effects of crime on the social fabric. With this instrument, LAPOP was able to prove that the community members perceive declines in neighbourhood disorder, especially the presence of gangs and youth loitering (Selingson et al., 2016).

Regarding violence against children and youth, quantitative information in Latin American countries is scarce and limited. Reports such as the World Report of Violence against Children (Pinheiro, 2006), the Mapa da violencia: Os jovens da América Latina (Waiselfisz, 2008) and the Global Study on Homicide 2013 (UNODC, 2013), offer a comparative perspective, but they focus on the national level. To have more detailed information about cities it is necessary to consult the administrative record in each municipality. With respect to school violence, the UNICEF report, School Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean (Eljach, 2011), states that there is not enough information in the countries and based its conclusion on several qualitative studies. In various cities there are surveys of school-age children that can be useful for information about the variables identified in the matrix. In the last decade the numbers of children and youth observatories throughout the region have increased. This has been linked to monitoring of commitments made by countries within the
framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These observatories produce basic information about violence against children and systematise the social and economic data. A review of the reports and databases developed by these initiatives in nine countries (Table 2) shows that in most of the cases they desegregate records by departments and municipalities (including cities). Regarding the analysis about gangs and criminal activities, three countries have specific reports. Panama is the only observatory with a focus on gangs; in Uruguay the emphasis is on crimes committed by children and youth; in Colombia, given the impact of the armed conflict, the main concern is the recruitment of children and adolescents by groups operating outside the law, especially guerrillas and criminal gangs.

The Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF – Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) developed a probabilistic econometric model to identify dynamics and measure the risk of recruitment and use of children and adolescents by extra-legal armed groups (ICBF, 2014). This model identifies the probability of recruitment at the municipal level, considering a set of 234 variables. This model estimated that 38 of the 1093 municipalities have high risk of recruitment of children and adolescents. One of its findings is that school dropouts and the availability of vocational secondary education are significant variables that establish risk for recruitment.

Table 2. Children and Youth Observatories in Latin America – Inputs for the matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Children and Youth Victimisation</th>
<th>Social and economic context</th>
<th>Youth gang and organised crime</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td><a href="http://www.icbf.gov.co/portal/page/portal/Observatorio1">http://www.icbf.gov.co/portal/page/portal/Observatorio1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observatorio del Bienestar de la Niñez</td>
<td>Homicides Domestic and school violence</td>
<td>By Municipality</td>
<td>Recruitment of children and adolescents by groups operating outside the Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td><a href="http://www.observatorioni%C3%B1ez.cl">http://www.observatorioniñez.cl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observatorio de Niñez y Adolescencia</td>
<td>Homicides Domestic and school violence</td>
<td>By Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observatorio de los derechos de la Niñez y la Adolescencia</td>
<td>Homicides Domestic and school violence</td>
<td>By Province</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td><a href="http://www.observatoriode">http://www.observatoriode</a> lostderechosdelaninezylaad olescencia.org/index.php</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>W</td>
<td><a href="http://ihnfa.gob.hn/odn/">http://ihnfa.gob.hn/odn/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A tool that merits particular mention is the Child Security Index (CSI), an open-source smartphone app developed by Igarapé Institute in Brazil to map the experience of children and youth in violence-affected areas (Moestue et al., 2015). The first pilot study of the CSI was done in “hot spot” neighbourhoods in Recife, the capital city of Pernambuco (Brazil). The survey collected data showing that the gender and age of respondents were more important explanatory factors than location. The experience in Recife demonstrated that the CSI as a digital survey app could be used as a real time assessment technology that can also be adapted to other research questions and contexts (Moestue et al., 2015). The CSI shows the importance of using information and communication technology, an emerging practice with great potential in Latin America where the number of cell phones is increasing year by year.

Regarding the study of organised crime and gangs, the information is fragmented and, with some exceptions, anecdotal. Hodginson et al. (2009) and Gravel et al. (2013) note the weak and scattered research on this field, despite numerous efforts (Abt and Winship, 2016). Reliable information about criminal groups is scarce throughout the region. According to Jütersonke et al. (2009), the official record keeping is problematic owing to under-reporting, deficient data collection, and political
interference. Quantitative information is not reliable and is not oriented to address public policy design. Most of the inputs come from qualitative studies that provide useful analysis but are difficult to manage in a more systematic way.

The review presented in this section reveals the gap between the available data and the relevant information required to study community risk factors. Given this reality, most of the time governments and international aid agencies in Latin America are flying blind with respect to violence prevention strategies for children and youth. The scientific knowledge about the risk of violence and crime and the involvement of children and youth in criminal organisations refers mainly to developed countries and only in a few cases to studies done in Latin America. This lack of information and analysis hampers the design of effective intervention strategies and also the evaluation of interventions.

One of the main difficulties faced by public policy is the fragmentation and disconnection between different streams of information. To understand the interaction between the inadequate presence of the state and weak justice systems and the erosion of social capital in the context of fragile cities we need not only to increase access to data but also strengthen the capacity to analyse trends and anticipate changes.

**Policy Responses and Interventions at the Community Level**

This section provides a typology to identify and classify different kinds of interventions that have the potential to affect the variables identified in the analytical framework. The aim is to analyse community-level interventions, based on the available information about specific cases. This section does not pretend to be an exhaustive review of the initiatives or best practices.

For purposes of analysis we can simplify the proposed model to two main dimensions: state institutional capacity and social capital. The interaction between these two spheres influences the competitive advantage of organised crime and gangs, either providing incentives or imposing costs and risks (Figure 3).
When state capacity and social capital are low, the advantages to organised crime and gangs benefit. On the other hand, when state capacity and social capital are high the advantages to organised crime and gangs are diminished. To facilitate the analysis of the interventions at the community level, this section identifies four stylised scenarios: Fragility, Enforcement First, Informal Arrangements and Capacity Building (Figure 4).

**Fragility.** In this scenario there are neither interventions nor strategies. Illegal groups enforce their rules and impose an illegal order on communities. The population is not cohesive and the social environment is broken. Examples of this stage can be found in areas in which organised crime
colludes with the state to disrupt society in a violent manner, without generating linkages with local inhabitants, who are subject to collective fear (Garzón, 2012)

**Enforcement first.** In the case of the Central American countries, Rodgers et al. (2009) identify this kind of intervention as “first generation policies”, better known in the region as *Mano Dura* (Iron-Fist). According to the authors these strategies combine aggressive crackdown operations with increased penalties to deter gang membership. The state security apparatus, along with the participation of the communities, executes the interventions.

**Informal arrangements.** In the absence of an effective state response, citizens might adopt a range of strategies to respond or resist violence and those who perpetrate it (McLean-Hilker et al., 2010). In some cases, the community has the capacity to make arrangements with criminal factions to protect vulnerable groups (such as children and youth), establish non-violence zones (for example, schools or public spaces), interrupt the diffusion of violence between the members of the neighbourhood, and develop informal conflict resolution mechanisms.

**Capacity building.** This category refers to initiatives that link the capacities of the state with community initiatives, along with the participation of multiple levels of government. One of the main objectives is to build collaboration across actors and sectors, increasing the preventive factors against violence and crime. In this scenario it is possible to find cooperative relationships between the state and the community, creating a *positive resilience*, understood as a cooperative relationship between the state and community, and between different societal actors (Davis, 2012). A key component of this kind of intervention is to build trust to enforce public order.

This section will focus on scenarios (B) Capacity Building and (D) Informal arrangements. The first step to identify effective interventions on this field is to review the available studies and meta-analyses related to these topics, taking into account the following criteria of eligibility, based on Abt and Winship, 2015:

1. **Reviews.** Eligible reviews were systematic reviews and meta-analysis that consider the results of multiples studies.
2. **Region.** Eligible reviews focus on Latin America.
3. **Outcome.** Eligible reviews reported on at least one or more of the following outcomes: gangs, youth violence, crime and youth.
4. **Quality.** Eligible reviews met minimum standards for methodological quality.
5. **Time period.** Eligible reviews were published between January 2005 and December 2015.
6. **Languages.** Eligible reviews were written in English and Spanish.
Two reviews fit these parameters: “Youth violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean: a scoping review of the evidence” (Moestue et al., 2013) and “Preventive Interventions to Reduce Youth Involvement in Gangs and Gang Crime in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review” (Higginson et al., 2015).

These two reviews highlight the lack of rigorous evaluations in Latin America. Moestue et al. found only 18 studies that satisfy the high standards set by the authors and only one area in which the evidence is comparatively strong: the school-based and education projects. In the case of Higginson et al., researchers could not identify a sufficient number of studies to perform a review. The authors were unable to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of preventive gang interventions. Additionally, Higginson et al. (2015) suggest that much of the focus of the gang literature “is more lived experience of the gang member and less on the effectiveness or otherwise of preventive intervention”.

Within the excluded themes as defined by Moestue et al. (2013), the researchers underscore that policing initiatives have a long-standing role in violence prevention in Latin America, but they are not necessarily youth specific. The authors quote the Plan Cuadrante evaluation in Colombia, an assessment of the positive impacts of police participation on lethal violence in selected poor neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro, and a study conducted on policing initiatives in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. These interventions had positive outcomes, decreasing the rates of youth homicides at the local level, but they do not focus on modifying the risk factor of youth violence.

Gravel et al. (2013), in their review, “Keeping promises: A systematic review and a new classification of gang control strategies,” although excluded because it did not refer to Latin America, suggest that in the case of the United States more generalised strategies to prevent crime and violence can be more effective than those tailored specifically to gangs. They argue that a specific focus on gang identity may only serve to increase social cohesion between gang members. In the case of Latin America, Abt and Winship (2016) propose that reframing policy approaches to gangs in this manner can be a promising approach to face this problem.

Assuming this perspective, and taking into account that it is not possible to identify a significant number of studies to arrive to solid conclusions based on the available reviews, this section will consider different kinds of interventions described in the grey literature that have positive outcomes in preventing or containing youth violence and the influence of organised crime – following the scenarios B and D.

A large number of programmes are mentioned in the literature. In most cases they are considered as examples of preventive approaches to crime and violence in Latin America, but they are not supported by evidence of their effective impacts or by a rigorous evaluation. Given this lack of information, I can offer an overview of these interventions at the community level but I can’t judge
their effectiveness or reproducibility. Figure 5 points out the main identified interventions at the community level.

**Figure 5. Interventions to strengthen capacity building and informal arrangements**

**Resolving conflict and addressing grievances.** Formal justice institutions can provide a nonviolent forum for addressing disputes and conflicts between members of the community, thereby preventing violent escalation. Across Latin America there are different community-based mediation and arbitration centres that facilitate access to justice for marginalised neighbourhoods (World Bank, 2010). A popular model is the Casas de Justicia (Houses of Justice) that provide legal information and conflict resolution services (the name varies depending on the country). In some cases the justice system offers mobile courts to provide services in remote areas (OECD, 2011). According to Ungar (2009) community justice helps by allowing citizens to bring to the surface underlying problems like domestic violence and youth unemployment. Some studies show that most of the cases resolved by these institutions are related to those sorts of problems (García et al., 2015). It is difficult to determine the impacts of this kind of mechanism given the limited information and lack of rigorous evaluation. Nevertheless, it is important to consider these experiences and their potential to prevent violence and to reinforce the capabilities of the communities to resolve their own problems.

**Community policing.** This type of response involves the systematic use of police-community partnerships and solving community problems with a closer interaction with citizens (Bakrania, 2013). As Guerra (2005) states, in some cases, police collaborate with other agencies to identify and refer youth in need of services. In other cases, police work with local programmes to enhance opportunities for youth. According to the World Bank (2011) community policing is more responsive
and accountable to local communities, with positive effects such as higher rates of crime reporting and increased in the level of trust.

**Community Policing in Latin America**

In Latin America, initiatives to bring the police closer to communities and strengthen their preventive focus have been initiated in specific units or territories. Some examples are the “Police Pacification Units” (Unidades de Policía Pacificadora – UPP) in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) or the Quadrants Plan (Plan Cuadrantes) in Colombia. Similarly, Nicaragua’s community-centred policing model—“Comprehensive policy on police - community relations and human rights”—(Política Integral de relaciones policía – comunidad y derechos humanos) has become a prototype for community policing in the region.

These initiatives have produced concrete results to bring down crime rates, especially homicide levels. A study by the Violence Analysis Laboratory (Laboratório de Análise de Violência) in 13 slums (favelas) where the UPP programme was implemented, from January 2006 to June 2011, found that lethal violence rates declined by as much as 78 percent, with average monthly murders dropping from 0.86 to 0.16 (Cano, 2012). Based primarily on establishing territorial control, this strategy is carried out in three phases: 1) “tactical” intervention by the military police; 2) stabilisation; and 3) consolidation. The UPP is responsible for the latter two stages. According to Fernández de Castro et al. (2013), in contrast to the previous “strike and retreat” approach, this model operates as a form of community policing where spatial presence and quality of service differ significantly from traditional policing models.

Colombia’s National Plan for Community Policing by Quadrants (Plan Nacional de Vigilancia Comunitaria por Cuadrantes – PNVCC), which has been implemented in eight cities, developed a decentralised law enforcement strategy based on establishing close police ties with the community in order to address social problems and respond to crime. It is implemented based on a strategic study of each quadrant and relies on geo-referenced data to inform decision-making and improve resource distribution. An evaluation by the Ideas for Peace Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz) found that police stations with units fully trained to operate under this model were more effective at controlling crime compared to their counterparts who had not received this training. This evaluation attributed 18 percent of the drop in homicides in the cities studied to Plan Cuadrantes (Llorente and Bulla, 2011).

Turning to Nicaragua, it should be noted that the country has maintained a consistently low murder rate for the past decade, in contrast to the spiraling violence in other countries in the northern triangle of Central America. According to Savenije and Van der Borgh (2009), the Nicaraguan police, with active community involvement, focused on early detection of gang formation and successfully demobilised existing gangs through “peace agreements” brokered between neighbouring gangs.
Over 2,000 youth have been reintegrated into society through the implementation of this community policing model. As Santamaría (2013) notes, state intervention and the activation of social networks has helped dissipate crime and violence at the local level.

These types of programmes in Latin America have faced their share of difficulties and criticism. In most cases, new policing models have been implemented in special units, while police agencies as a whole continue to follow traditional models. In his critique of initiatives modeled after what is generally referred to as “community policing,” Hugo Frühling (2003) asserts that they have not been afforded the necessary resources, have not contributed to more radical institutional change, and have confronted a police subculture that remains skeptical about their implementation.

According to the World Health Organization (2015), there are no systematic reviews of the impact of community and problem-oriented policing that focus especially on youth or violent crime in young people.

**Comprehensive approach.** This approach takes into account not only the impacts of organised crime or gangs, but also the factors that provide incentives to young people to engage in risky and violent behaviour (Cunningham et al., 2008), addressing youth gang violence from a multidimensional perspective, including prevention, rehabilitation and suppression strategies (WOLA, 2006). These interventions involve multiple actors and institutions, with an active participation of the communities, capitalising on the strength and diversity of multiple stakeholders. One of the key elements is the participation of those directly affected in the design and development of the intervention.

An example of this approach is the Fica Vivo (Stay Alive) Programme in Minas Gerais, Brasil. Launched in 2003, this programme grew out of a geo-referenced study on violent crimes committed from 1992 to 2002 conducted by the government and the Federal University of Minas Gerais. It aims to reduce the number of murders in high-risk populations, namely young men aged 15 to 19 years. The programme defined two lines of action: 1) improve the way police deal with lethal violence, and 2) create a social protection network for potential victims and perpetrators of lethal violence.

The programme targeted six disadvantaged neighbourhoods with the highest violence rates. It set up task forces comprised of police, prosecutors, and representatives of the child welfare agency and the schools to design long-term strategies tailored to the problems in each area. The task forces implemented a youth-centred approach to problem-solving reinforced by social programmes. The programme also prioritised the prosecution of repeat offenders. From 2004 to 2007, the programme’s target communities saw an average of over 50 percent drop in the murder rate, surpassing the overall decrease for the city as a whole.

Another case that illustrates this kind of intervention is *Todos Somos Juárez* (We are all Juárez), in Ciudad Juárez (México). This programme, established in 2010, adopted a multi-sector approach to
comprehensively address the persistent social and economic risks associated with vulnerability and insecurity (UNDP, 2013). The strategy focused on six basic sectors: public security, economic growth, employment, health, education, and social development (Dudley, 2013). According to the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2015) through this initiative the government finances social programmes to make communities, especially young people, more resistant to violent crime. While this intervention has met criticism, there are some positive results, such as the decline of the levels of homicide and other forms of victimisation. One important point to highlight is that the impact of this programme was never evaluated.

Along Latin America there are multiple participatory initiatives with a range of sizes and shapes, most of them without assessment of their impacts. Multilateral and bilateral aid agencies are giving more attention to comprehensive and integrated approaches that go beyond narrowly addressing a single risk factor (Moestue et al., 2013). According to Muggah and Szabo (2014), international cooperation has begun to shift towards preventive policies and investments in community police forces, access to justice, and good governance. There is an open question about the outcomes of these efforts and their capacity to develop a sustainable change. A study by WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America) and the Inter-American Development Bank (2011) identified 423 projects in Central America and found a serious lack of coordination and consultation between governments and donors and the duplication of efforts in the region.

**Pacts and truces.** Basombrío and Dammert (2013) state that it is not always possible to fight crime within the framework of norms and formal institutions, pointing out the numerous historical precedents for concluding pacts with criminal groups in order to limit their negative consequences. According to Wennmann (2014), in the context of crime-related urban violence, authorities and communities negotiate violence-free or crime-free zones in which residents are left in relative peace. This author analyses the case of Barrio de Paz projects in Ecuador that worked at the community level to facilitate truces among youth gangs and to provide job training to gang members. This initiative has been identified as one of the causes of the reduction in violence in Ecuador between 2006 and 2008 and to the peace between the two largest gangs (Hazen, 2010).

Another example of this kind of pact occurred in El Salvador. In 2012, the government and the country’s two dominant gangs – the Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 – agreed to a truce. The deal involved the transfer from leaders of both gangs from a high-security facility to a normal prison, in exchange for halting gang violence and establishing a series of “peace zones” (Hope, 2012). During the truce, the murder rates dropped from 70.1 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011 to 41 per 100,000 the following year. According to Cruz (2013) this initiative exposed two glaring facts. First, the negotiating power of gangs was intrinsically linked to violence. Second, the authorities were to a large extent dependent on the will and ability of gang leaders to reduce lethal violence in the country (Cruz, 2013). From the beginning, the truce was fragile and lacked public support, and the executive was ambivalent and failed to invest the necessary resources to strengthen the process (Garzón, 2016).
Despite the difficult circumstances, according to UNDP (2013) the truce catalysed a process to develop a much wider range of alternatives for social reinsertion and integration, as well as creating space to address the underlying factors associated with violence. Unfortunately, this process ended with the arrival of a new government in June of 2014 that changed the perspective to a new anti-gang strategy. With the end of the truce the homicide rate increased again. In 2015 El Salvador was the most violent country in the world with 116 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. An aggressive police offensive has since been linked to dozens of massacres and disappearances of gang members (Muggah, 2016).

One of the main issues with the pacts and truces is the creation of a fragile security situation in which the state tolerates illegal markets and criminal factions. Under these circumstances, criminal organisations can take advantage and legitimise their control over territories. The truce can be an opportunity to face the underlying factors associated with the gangs that especially affect children and young people (UNDP, 2013), but governments must increase well-targeted social investment in the neighbourhoods.

**Informal arrangements – the gray zone.** In a context lacking effective state responses, citizens adopt a range of strategies to cope with, resist, and survive violence and insecurity (McLean-Hilker et al., 2010). We can take these communities’ experiences as a point of departure to understand the dynamics at the local level and the collective strategies to deal with gangs and criminal organisations. In practice, one of the problems is to identify and make a systematic review of these practices and mechanisms. Given this reality, top-down interventions tend to ignore local capacities and informal arrangements, with the risk of exacerbating community tensions and violence (World Bank, 2010). Despite the lack of information, this kind of informal intervention should be recognised and integrated into analytical frameworks.

The analysis of policy responses and interventions at the community level covered in this section provides a model to classify the multiple programmes and initiatives implemented in the context with a strong influence of gangs and organised crime. Given the lack of information and rigorous evaluations in Latin America, it is difficult to identify the key variables that have the potential to impact the levels of youth violence and crime. In most of the cases, it was not possible to find a systematic review of the different kinds of interventions focussing specially on children and youth.

The WHO (2015) emphasises that interventions at the level of the individual or immediate interpersonal relationships typically focus on effects on risk factors for youth violence, such as attitudes and behaviours; by contrast, community and society-level strategies can be evaluated for their effects on direct measures of youth violence, including rates of homicide and non-fatal, assault-related injuries. These latter types of injuries appear in admissions to emergency departments and in victimisation surveys. From this perspective, we should note that some of the strategies that achieved significant decreases in the levels of violence do not focus on addressing the underlying factors but rather adopt a pragmatic perspective to manage the influence of gangs and criminal organisations.
Another factor that can contribute positively is the interaction between formal and informal institutions and the cooperation between multiple actors in the most problematic neighbourhoods.

The main problem in Latin America is not only the lack of interventions but also the implementation of multiple initiatives that are not systematically evaluated. Most of the evidence about the effectiveness of prevention measures comes from high-income countries that have quite different circumstances, not only in terms of the magnitude of the problems but also in terms of resources and state capacity. Given these contrasts, it is difficult to know what works in reducing the impact of gangs and organised crime on children in the Latin American setting.

Conclusions

This chapter proposes an analytical framework to understand how the lack of state capacity and the breakdown of the social capital interact to provide a fertile ground for the influence of criminal organisations and increase the risk on children and youth. With this goal the text analyses the connections between institutional weakness and the erosion of social capital as push factors, and the benefits of joining a criminal faction as pull factors. The main contribution of this approach is the depiction of the “competitive advantage of organised crime and gangs”. This concept helps us analyse how the absence or the weakness of the state and the collective responses by the community increase the capacities of criminal actors to control territories and affect children and youth.

This chapter identifies a basket of 13 indicators and 34 variables linked to the analytical framework. The selection criteria of the variables took into account their inclusion in previous surveys in Latin America, the feasibility of information collection methods and the availability of resources. The review of the public information, especially administrative records and the reports from the youth observatories in Latin America, reveals the gap between the available data and the relevant information required to study the community risk factors. Based on this exercise, this text concludes that most of the time governments and international donors in Latin America are flying blind with respect to children and youth violence prevention strategies. However, there is an opportunity to fill this gap using different methodological tools and new ways to collect the information.

Additionally, this chapter undertakes a review of selected community-level interventions implemented in Latin America, through the elaboration of four scenarios based on interactions between state institutional capacity and social capital: Fragility, Enforcement First, Informal Arrangements and Capacity Building. Given the lack of information and rigorous evaluations in Latin America, it was difficult to draw conclusions about what works and why at the community level. There are four dimensions that display some positive results: resolving conflict and addressing grievances, community policing, comprehensive approach, and pacts and truces. Despite the absence of systematic reviews, the observations of specific cases and experiences allow the identification of key aspects of effective interventions.
One of the main conclusions is that at the community level strategies that achieved significant declines in levels of violence are not necessarily specific to children or youth. These interventions can involve a range of specific actions that focus on this vulnerable population, but usually they have a wider perspective. The fact that most of the victims and victimisers are part of this group implies that different programmes and strategies can affect them directly or indirectly. This is not to suggest that behind these interventions there is a sustainable model to affect the risk factors or underlying variables associated with violence and crime.

On the other hand, there are three key elements that can contribute to achieve effective interventions. First, the interaction between formal and informal institutions creates a set of norms and values that regulate life in community; this factor helps to diminish the influence of criminal groups and protect youth and children. Second, the concentration of the interventions should be aimed at specific places (neighbourhoods) and/or groups (for example a specific gang); this approach helps to optimise the resources and prioritise the main challenges. Third, the cooperation between multiple actors and levels of participation brings coherence to the strategy and contributes to a sustainable policy.

It is clear that there is no silver bullet to modify the risk factors and improve community resilience in urban contexts where gangs or criminal groups control territory and regulate everyday life. The lack of systematic information and evaluations about the interventions makes it difficult to identify effective strategies. Most of the time multilateral and bilateral cooperation, state institutions, and non-governmental organisations intervene with scarce data about local conditions. To bridge gaps in knowledge, a clear priority is to identify and measure the key variables at the community level. This chapter proposes a set of indicators to be included in this research agenda. The next step is to develop a standardised methodology to track child and youth violence and the effects of the different interventions (Moestue et al., 2013). There are promising cases that use new technologies and tools to understand the impacts of violence and organised crime on the most vulnerable groups. Data-driven measures must be a priority in the agenda.
References


Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública Y Justicia Penal. 2015. For the Fourth Consecutive Year, San Pedro Sula is the Most Violent City in the World. Mexico.


Esbensen, F., and Maxson, C., eds. 2012. Youth Gangs in International Perspective- Results from the Eurogang Program of Research. Springer.


