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Urban Security Exchange:

Data, Design and Innovation
for Urban Security

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1. Introduction

The Urban Security Exchange: Data, Design and Innovation for Urban Security was held on January 22 and 23, 2018 in San Salvador, at a critical time for Central American countries. On one hand, in early 2018, the capitals of the Northern Triangle countries – Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – reported significant reductions in their high homicide rates; while on the other, these positive results highlighted the complex efforts necessary to maintain this downward trend amidst the struggle against violence.

Effectively, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras present some of the highest homicide rates in the world. In 2018, El Salvador leads the ranking and its capital, San Salvador, is one of the most violent cities on the planet. Nevertheless, such cities were able to reduce their homicide rates between 2016 and 2017. In El Salvador, the rate dropped by 34%, in Honduras, 22% and in Guatemala, 4%. This context of persistently high homicide rates in spite of reductions was a key element throughout the discussion endorsed by the Urban Security Exchange.

However, data on homicides reflects only part of relevant discussions on the state, challenges and policy opportunities related to violence in the region. Understanding the dynamics of violence, its causes and immediate and long-term consequences would demand the production, collection and dissemination of data on different types of violence. Statistics show that young men are the main victims of violence in the region; however, the victimization of women is qualitatively different. We know that the patterns

of victimization of women, children, the elderly differ greatly from the violence that affects men in particular. This difference amplifies when racial and ethnic factors are accounted for. Additionally, violence prevention and reduction policies that fail to specifically address the aforementioned topics are less effective when it comes to curbing violence.

Thus, stressing the centrality of data to inform public policies is key. Data also shows us how violence is distributed within Central American cities. The same city may have very safe neighborhoods and zones of acute social violence. It also allows us to identify the times and days when the violence is most intense. Proper monitoring allows us to identify and understand variations in urban security, which can impact the formulation, implementation and evaluation of strategies.

In Central American cities, violence reduction models based on a combination of innovations, such as the smart use of data and new technologies, and focus on youth, urban design, and arts have been successful towards transforming cities into safer places. The Urban Security Exchange: Data, Design and Innovation for Urban Security was carried out keeping these positive experiences in mind.

The event's goal was to gather people and institutions from different contexts and exchange experiences on approaching violence in an integrated and multidisciplinary manner. The goal was to develop a critical analysis of interventions and their results. Also, we focused on the vicinities of the region to explore innovative measures that have worked in other contexts and were replicated to address the complex problem of violence in neighboring countries.

As a result of the discussions, we would like to highlight the following debate topics:

- The experience of Central American countries highlight the centrality of prevention and the importance of multidimensional approaches to reduce violence. The integration of preventive efforts including education, health, housing and access to culture allied to the prioritization of rehabilitation and reinsertion measures has proven successful. Prevention policies become more efficient when supported by effective law enforcement and protection of the Rule of Law, with a strict focus on human rights.
- The need to create evidence-based security policies, from elaboration to implementation phases, was a transversal topic in all the discussions. Effectively, data is a key element for the planning, execution and evaluation of evidence-based policies. If policies are correctly monitored and evaluated from the start, they may generate measurable impacts on all expressions of violence. These can then be transformed into innovations to be shared to other contexts.

- The experience of many cities show that violence reduction policies are most efficient when they combine preventive measures with law enforcement ones. The use of strategies such as interventions in hot spots, combined with firearm regulation measures, for example, can generate immediate results in terms of violence reduction. However, in order to maintain their long-term sustainability, interventions that address the structural causes of violence, such as labor opportunities for the youth as well as gender and social inequality must be implemented.
- Likewise, law enforcement policies must avoid abusive use of force, and especially the stigmatization and prosecution of youth. “Iron fist” policies, for example, can be effective in the short term, but can also generate negative effects that affect the credibility and legitimacy of state institutions, besides leading to frequent human rights violations.
- There are no evaluations of the driving factors that led to homicide and violence reduction in the Northern Triangle countries. Understanding the causes behind the downward trend should be a priority, and lessons from the region should be shared with the world. The experience of several cities in this region suggest that violence reduction follows different phases. For sustainable results, strategies must be allied to a consolidated process of institutional strengthening, to the least.
- Political polarization of security complicates the design of long-term programs and strategies. Although governments must demonstrate effective results to the population, the use of insecurity as an electoral campaign topic jeopardizes an informed national dialogue. It can take years for the best results of prevention policies to become apparent. However, short political terms lead politicians to favor more visible policies, such as criminal repression or incarceration, that have quick, albeit unsustainable, results.
- In El Salvador, we can highlight the Plan El Salvador Seguro, that uses an evidence-based holistic approach to citizen security.¹ In a context of political transition, we see a clear need to sustain an integral focus on territorial engagement, with the involvement of several actors. It is based on prevention, criminal control and prosecution, attention to and protection of victims, rehabilitation and reinsertion and, finally, institutional strengthening measures.
- The impact of violence is different for men and women, as are the opportunities generated by an integrated responses to violence, regarding the problems with gang violence, and other forms of violence identified in the urban context.

¹ For further information: CONSEJO NACIONAL DE SEGURIDAD CIUDADANA Y CONVIVENCIA, 2017. Plan El Salvador Seguro. Available at: <http://www.seguridad.gob.sv/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/3.-Plan-El-Salvador-Seguro.pdf>.

- Promoting employment and education is a key aspect of violence reduction in the long run. We see the need to make immediate changes in prisons and youth detention centers, as well as to encourage the transforming role of art for society and, occasionally, among younger populations.

The Urban Security Exchange in San Salvador was the fifth of its kind organized by the Igarapé Institute since 2014. Previous versions took place in Rio de Janeiro (2014)², Mexico City (2014)³, Cape Town (2015)⁴ and Bogotá (2015)⁵, with the presence of several local partners. Urban Security Exchange's innovative design, topic choice and the strategy identifying and sharing innovative solutions were based on this previous experience. What is more it promoted an honest dialogue between relevant stakeholders from different backgrounds to define future priorities for urban security.

This report is divided into three parts. The first highlights the innovative methodologies designed to stimulate and inspire participants. The second focuses on the main takeaway messages from the panels and workshops, including violence trends, violence reduction strategies, and innovative interventions that could be implemented in El Salvador and the region. The following section features thematic debates with topics on various themes, including gender, employment, education, youth, the situation in jails and strategies for funding security. Finally, the last section provides recommendations and a roadmap for the future.

2 For further information: INSTITUTO IGARAPÉ, 2014. Tornando as cidades brasileiras mais seguras. Special edition of the Dialogues on Citizen Security in Rio de Janeiro. Available at: https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/AE-08_TORNANDO-AS-CIDADES-BRASILEIRAS-MAIS-SEGURAS-completa.pdf.

3 For further information: INSTITUTO IGARAPÉ; INSYDE, 2014. Nuevos retos y nuevas concepciones de la seguridad en México. Special edition of the Dialogues on Citizen Security in México City. Available at: https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AE-15_NOVOS-RETOS-DE-LA-SEGURIDAD-EN-MEXICO-2.pdf.

4 For further information: INSTITUTO IGARAPÉ; APCOF, 2015. Citizen Security Dialogues: Dispatches from South Africa. Stability Journal. Special Collection. Available at: <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/collections/special/citizen-security-dialogues-south-africa/>.

5 For further information: INSTITUTO IGARAPÉ; FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA PAZ, 2016. Controlando el territorio y construyendo seguridad y justicia en el posconflicto colombiano. Special edition of the Dialogues on Citizen Security in Bogotá. Available at: https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/AE-24_Stability-29-11.pdf.

2. Innovative methodology



Participants in a discussion in one of the scenario workshops. Photo: Jose Sosa

A central feature of the Urban Security Exchange was the existence of different spaces for discussion, debate and learning, leaving behind the traditional format of unilateral conferences where experts expose their knowledge to an audience with limited time for discussion. As a result, there were several opportunities for more open and informal discussion which allowed a greater number of attendees to actively participate.

The innovative methodology used during the Exchange enabled the creation of informal spaces for free and honest discussion on the difficult topics addressed during the event. Likewise, the diversity of participants was guaranteed by the presence of representatives from the private sector, international cooperation agencies, local governments, civil society and academia, not only from El Salvador, but from the whole Central American region. The call for participants was successful, and over 200 people attended the two days of the event.

The Exchange also impacted local and international media coverage. One of the goals of the event was to promote a broad discussion on citizen security that would go beyond geographical barriers of usual discussions, leading to the implementation of a strong media strategy⁶.

⁶ To illustrate our social media reach (Twitter and Facebook), 60,000 people were reached by the messages about the Dialogues posted on the accounts of Instituto Igarapé. Between January 17 and January 26, Igarapé's Twitter account tweeted 31 times about the event, reaching 38,660 people, providing information on the agenda and presentations. In conventional media, we have identified 19 mentions by the Salvadorian and international media. The following vehicles announced the event: Americas Quarterly, El Faro, La Prensa Gráfica, Latin America Daily Briefing; Revista Factum; Focos TV and El Diario de Hoy. These mentions include features on television, radio, Internet, printed media and opinion columns.

Besides panels, with a conversational format, we organized workshops and field visits; the latter with the intent of offering the possibility to experiencing innovative policies. Thematic workshops focused on specific proposals, leading to debate on upscaling initiatives proposed by discussion leaders, and to the design of some follow-up plans. Scenario workshops promoted debates on the state of public security in 10 years, with an optimistic view, and participants were pushed to think of what are the necessary steps to achieve this view, using the PESTLE method⁷.

Field visits allowed us to explore and interact in different spaces, such as: youth detention centers, prisons, the command center of the National Police, and some neighborhoods considered to be the most insecure ones in San Salvador. At every opportunity, there were presentations on violence prevention programs – especially tertiary prevention.

At Centro Penal de Apanteos, we became familiar with the program ‘Yo cambio’, with joint coordination by the criminal center’s administration and an organization called CRS (Catholic Relief Services). The program develops several activities to improve prisoners’ skillset and the values necessary for swifter reintegration into society. Another program, “Soy Autor” is carried out by an organization called ConTextos at a youth detention center (El Espino) and highlights the powerful role of education in youth transformation. Participants listened to stories written by young boys and girls, exchanged experiences and wrote a poem together.

There were also visits to several vulnerable communities of San Salvador, accompanied by the DespertarES initiative, and the participants got to know the types of transformations achieved through arts and music in some of the communities most affected by urban violence. Other participants went to the video surveillance center of Santa Tecla and had the chance to learn about the inner workings of the center, the surveillance cameras system and its integration with the work of the local police.

Finally, artists were invited to illustrate how art can communicate the impact of violence and transformation opportunities. During breaks between panels and workshops, open spaces exhibited urban art, photography and theater. The combination of these methodologies was one of the key elements behind the event’s dynamics, discussions and impacts, which focused primarily on transformation and ideas that are central to changing the outlook in terms of violence in El Salvador and the region.

⁷ The PESTLE methodology is an instrument that facilitates the discussion about a problem, assisting the definition of the surroundings and future perspectives by analyzing a series of factors, the initials of which form the name of the method: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental.

3. From repressive policies to prevention: innovations in public security



Opening panel. Participants discussing urban security in Central America. Photo: David Pivaral.

The panels focused on regional violence trends and effective policies to prevent and reduce them. The starting point was the important ongoing transformation in El Salvador and the Northern Triangle region, identifying several lessons learned and many challenges. Listed below are the main conclusions and recommendations offered by panelists.

The integrated violence prevention efforts employed by the Northern Triangle countries at the local level towards have started to produce results. In El Salvador, the National Council on Citizen Security (CNSCC) was established in September 2014 to facilitate dialogue, providing input to improve national policies and plans on justice,

citizen security and coexistence, and propose avenues for the implementation of policies on this matter. State institutions, local government representatives, churches, means of communication, private companies, political parties, civil society representatives and the international community are part of the Council.

The main product of the CNSCC is the Plan El Salvador Seguro (PESS). Responsibility for the implementation of the PESS lies with different State institutions and is carried out in inter-institutionally, in association with churches, private companies, media, civil society organizations and the international community. The PESS is based on the National Policy of Justice and Public Security's five axes and defines expected results, adoption strategies for and which actions should be urgently implemented. During the implementation phase of the PESS, the National Council on Citizen Security (CNSCC) is responsible for creating alliances in order to execute the Plan, contributing to the creation of a favorable environment for the development and achievement of results, contributing to effective conversation among the different sectors, following up on the accomplishment of scheduled actions and evaluating their impact on projected achievements.

This strategy combines measures for prevention, control and criminal prosecution, the attention and protection of victims, rehabilitation and reinsertion, and institutional strengthening. By ensuring municipal participation in the process, the PESS was able to reach cities and territories considered particularly vulnerable to violence.

The centrality of prevention in the strategies is a key factor, as well as **accurate diagnosis, focusing on issues of insecurity and violence at the city and neighborhood level**. Sharing data transparently can generate trust between the authorities and the citizens and improve policy sustainability.

Incarceration and criminal prosecution has not had a deterrent effect on regional crime: a higher number of arrests is not directly related to violence reduction. This is shown by the persistence of high criminality rates, despite the growing incarcerated population in the region. Furthermore, investigations show that most criminals are repeat-offenders, and prisons may serve as crime schools.

Interventions based on control and criminal prosecution, besides having high costs related to human rights violations, are not sustainable throughout time. In the region, there are no evaluations on the effectiveness of policies based on the maintenance of public order to effectively reduce violence. However, the devastating impact of such interventions is widely documented.

We recognize that the **reduction of homicides is generally used as a spearhead in electoral campaigns**, highlighting the alleged effectiveness of a certain type of policy for violence control. To face public opinion, politicians opt for the easy way out, adopting interventions that use physical strength and that usually only report short-term results.



Panel 1 on trends in urban security in Central America. Photo: David Pivaral.

This is the opportunity to promote balanced plans, which are both politically feasible and occasionally effective. We must **abandon the idea that policies to maintain public order necessarily conflict with prevention**. It is possible to implement holistic policies, with the police working assertively and actively towards prevention, without neglecting the clearly interdictive and controlling role of the public force. In order to achieve this balance, it is paramount to **strengthen institutional capacities for an appropriate law enforcement**. It is necessary to change commonly adopted goals and success indicators, such as increases in arrests and apprehensions of drugs and arms. **To generate transformation, policies and monitoring practices must be results-based.**

Transformative and innovative processes must wait for appropriate contexts.

Their implementation requires strong institutions and political will. Innovative policies require a police force that is willing and able to act not only in public order emergencies. Much on the contrary, interventions based on the right decisions, knowledge of the territory and the external evaluation of private institutions are the ones that can generate real change. An example of that is the Plan Nacional de Vigilancia por Cuadrantes from Colombia, as well as the development of proper monitoring and analysis skills, such as the ISPGeo criminal analysis system of Rio de Janeiro state, in Brazil.



Participants in panel 2 discussing innovations in urban security. Photo: David Pivaral.

Innovative initiatives can also be generated at the community level. The Groups Violence Intervention (GVI) initiative aims to recognize the dynamics and context of groups associated with urban violence in the cities. It considers that **violence is highly concentrated in groups of individuals who work in networks**. Bearing this in mind, we must abandon the idea of generalized policing, and implement holistic action focused on certain groups. The identification of individuals that may work as violence “triggers”, along with coordinated efforts with the police force and other social organizations has had effective results.

We have identified **interventions whose results are supported by important evaluations, such as focused deterrence and cognitive behavioral therapy**. The latter focuses on providing youth with means and tools for better management of stress and rage, in situations including arrests, threatening contexts and destructive habits.

Regarding interventions, **evaluations are key to identifying mechanisms that generate positive change and the contextual elements found**. It is only through such elements that we can adapt an intervention from one place to another. Evaluations must not be solely focused on academic publications. Its true goal must be to identify mechanisms that can reduce violence and inhibit the conditions in which violence can occur.

3.1 Gendering urban security



Workshop participants discussing how gender roles influence urban insecurity. Photo: David Pivaral.

This workshop was based on the following question: “How can we make the cities safer for women and girls?” To answer this question, we considered the different impact of violence on men and women, as well as different opportunities that allow us to have this holistic view of violence. It is especially important to understand the different dynamics and effects of violence against women in one of the most complex setups of the region: gangs. Here, all inequities and forms of victimization are aggravated.

The participants were divided into four groups and discussed topics like: the formation of violent masculinity in contexts of extreme urban violence; the victimization dynamics of transgender women; the care system and access to justice; and, finally, the design of safe public spaces.

Socialization dynamics tend to reinforce violence and virility as some of the main characteristics of masculinity. The historical context of women’s exclusion in El Salvadorian society, their stigmatized role in society and the different risks and impacts of violence become clear in contexts with high rates of gang violence, a context that represents one of the biggest challenges in the country. Women who become part of these groups end up in positions of risk and subordination. On the other hand, the public aspect of violence usually changes in the case of women who maintain relationships with gang members.

It is necessary to promote initiatives that debate the roles of different population groups. For instance, the construction of 'new non-violent masculinities' and spaces for the joint creation of policies and projects that encompass different risks, fears and potentials of men, women and sexually diverse populations.

Likewise, professionals who work in victim protection and attention systems must be qualified to welcome survivors of violence and not reproduce stereotypes. Also, there is a lack of public policies and laws that regulate the situation of people who find themselves in a context of vulnerability due to their gender identity and sexuality. For this reason, we need to focus on understanding these different dynamics, promoting citizen participation in the formulation of public policies, and designing public spaces that prioritize violence prevention during early childhood, working with wider gender issues, which are so important to break the violence cycle.

3.2 An employment agenda for citizen security

In this workshop, we discussed the relationship between employment and peace, focusing on emerging interventions to improve the labor market in violent contexts, and highlighting their potential impacts in violence reduction. The discussion focused on the question: "How can employment contribute to the reduction of violence in cities?"

Discussions started with a strong piece of empirical evidence: there is a close and clear relationship between insecurity and employment. Effectively, job opportunities are key for primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and they are closely connected to one of the causes of violence: lack of opportunities – especially for youth – and economic inequality.

However, for many countries, lack of reliable information on the needs of the labor market hampers workforce qualification efforts for the existing opportunities. Therefore, in Guatemala, a private sector association carried out a thorough study on the talent and workforce needs in all economic sectors. The study led to the creation of labor interventions and qualification for employability.

Also, capacity building or "employment matching" programs are not always evidence-based. In fact, investigations on the impact of such programs for youth employability suggest that it is very hard to develop a direct relationship between intervention and the long-term labor results of beneficiaries. In Central America, a comprehensive study on the results in the medium and long term for interventions that focus on improving youth employability still needs to be carried out.

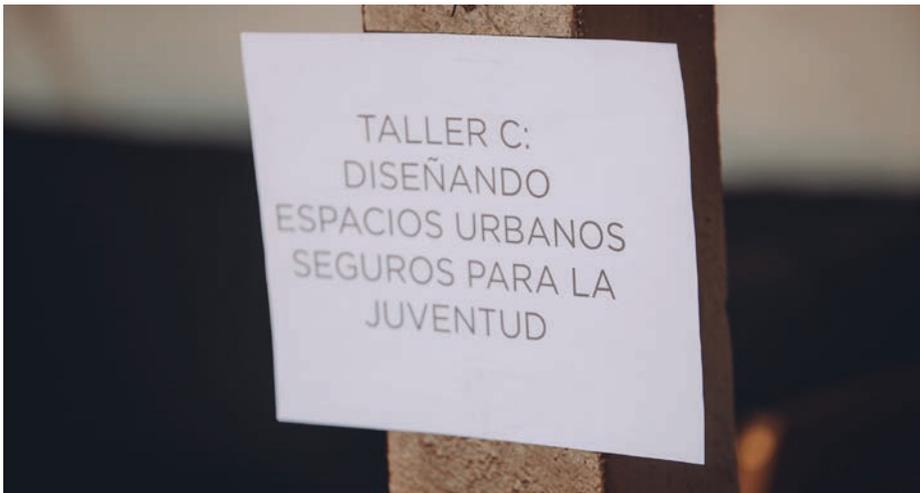
Sustainable and effective employment initiatives also plays a big role in reinsertion and inclusion programs for former inmates, especially in the 21st century, with ever stronger barriers for the insertion of this traditionally excluded population in formal labor markets.

Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of recognizing the role of churches and other actors – such as the private sector – for the conversion and reinsertion processes in El Salvador. For instance, the private sector must not be considered neither a victim nor as responsible for the insecurity. Debate on responsible capitalism, albeit necessary, cannot overshadow the importance of State incentives for the inclusion of groups who have been traditionally excluded by the private sector.

This situation suggests that now is the time for bold solutions, such as programs to foster customized skills to answer certain demands, like those that promote hiring of former gang members, or large programs with public construction that generate mass employment, for example.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of developing trust as the key element for a more transparent discussion on this topic. Increasing the opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between civil society and private companies can help build more trust between them.

3.4 Designing safe urban spaces for the youth



The participants in this workshop focused on the need to include young populations in the proposal of solutions to insecurity issues. Photo: David Pivaral.

The jumpstart questions were: “How can we build safe urban spaces for youth?” and “What lessons have we learned about promoting strategies of violence prevention/reduction among youth?” The participants discussed the following topics: youth leadership, violence prevention, marginalization and community participation.

Debate in this workshop focused on how territorial dynamics and physical surroundings determine the opportunities a young adult has to improve their condition in the labor market and their educational opportunities. We also worked with the idea that spaces for coexistence are a key element for the development of prevention activities. During the workshop, several regional experiences that promoted youth participation as the main transformational driver in violent spaces were debated.

One of such experiences promoted housing and the development of youth-focused community spaces. The assumption is that young people are key to generating transformative processes, especially those who display the most vulnerable characteristics – such as youth from unstructured families. Within this setting, structures used for coexistence inside communities represent a key element for violence prevention. Youth committees can and should lead necessary community processes to implement development projects, such as public common areas and access to decent housing, water and sanitation.

Territories with the highest rates of violence have high levels of social vulnerability. Working with youth in their communities is pivotal to achieve an effective empowerment process, answering their needs and designing solutions. All territorial interventions must not only be planned with the youth in mind, but they must be generated by them; the institutions must be capable of formulating proposals based on them.

Moreover, participants also highlighted that public spaces become locus of violence due to lack of maintenance and investment. Public spaces need to be lively so that more people can use them. In this sense, investment in public infrastructure goes beyond remodeling a public space, it also includes changing how people understand them.

Initiatives based on public spaces must potentialize, articulate and synchronize public and private social interventions in specific territories. Territorial interventions must foster human development, strengthen social structures and increment community participation and empowerment in the most vulnerable territories. Against this backdrop, initiatives that articulate and synchronize public and private investments increase social impact.

3.5 How will prisons in Central America work in 2028?

This discussion was based on the PESTLE methodology for prospective scenarios. We specifically discussed the factors that currently influence the situation of the penitentiary system and how they could influence the status of prisons 10 years from now. This methodology focuses on political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors.

Among the main challenges of the penitentiary system we identified, we emphasize the following: the absence of alternatives to incarceration, lack of reinsertion and rehabilitation programs, lack of opportunities to reduce sentences and high levels of incarceration for non-violent crimes. Restricting security issues exclusively to the Ministry of Security can have negative effects. On the contrary, this matter should be addressed in all areas of government. Regarding jails specifically, the following needs must be considered: educational, health, agriculture, among others. For this reason, other ministries, such as the Education, Culture, Agriculture, Health, etc. should also focus on jails, in order to not overburden the Ministry of Security.



Participants of the workshop on prisons in Central America identify main challenges for 2028. Photo: Josue Sosa.

While attempting to envisage what jails will be like in 10 years' time, the participants agreed that 90% of the people who are currently incarcerated should be undergoing alternative reinsertion measures and regimes, instead of being arrested. As for those who should be in jail, they must have access to psychosocial support and economic opportunity programs. Another determining factor is the need to search for restorative and non-punitive alternatives, prioritizing respect for the human rights of people who are deprived of their freedom.

3.6 How will citizen security in Central America be financed in 2028?

The forecast of security funding within 10 years started by considering different factors that guarantee stability and the permanent flow of resources, both for long term investments, and immediate and short-term contingencies.

Transparency must be the main pillar of funding, since, according to the exercise, corruption in public administration will have been reduced to practically zero in 10 years' time. Transparency would also mean that the population agrees with expenditure priorities and is able to verify that large public funds will be duly invested in such priorities. New models to accomplish agreements between citizens and municipalities on expenditures and innovative processes that inform taxpayers how their money will be used are realistic measures to build more trust between citizens and governments.

In order to achieve this positive scenario, the appropriate administration of limited resources must be guaranteed, so they are invested more efficiently. This includes novel funding models, a strict follow-up on the investments and expenditures, and a permanent review of the cost-benefit ratio – considering not only financial profitability, but also social impacts. Thus, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation must be the pillars of interventions.

The political aspect is key to plan for the main challenges, since the urgency of political promises seem to go against long-term projects and the appropriate planning of funding priorities. Among the challenges planned, we can find the need to promote the modernization of all State entities, as well as coherence with the international cooperation agenda.

The economic aspect, which is most directly affected by the funding strategy, considers the need for public-private partnerships and the generation of new sources of taxes. It is necessary to plan efficient models regarding funding structure, time, interests and investments, which allow more stability. Special taxes or extraordinary cooperation programs can temporarily address needs; yet, in the long term, countries must be able to appropriately fund their own security needs, which can imply in a substantial increase of the percentage dedicated to prevention, reinsertion and rehabilitation.

In the future, public finances can lead to active citizen participation, both to promote social control and transparency, and the planning of alternative and innovative models for the generation of resources. Technology is a key factor to guarantee accountability and the generation of different innovative indicators for monitoring and evaluation. Equally, a legal framework for funding and expenditure must be developed and instead of generating bureaucracies, it should make the funding system more flexible for security.

3.7 What is the role of education in citizen security in 2028?



Workshop on education. Photo: Josue Sosa.

This discussion started with a vision of schools 10 years from now as true community sites, surpass the reach of purely academic issues. Such spaces must become the center of social and community life, constituting places to meet others, for informal qualification and recreation, where children and youth take part in the participation and construction of the city.

To achieve this, we should first promote debate on citizenship, in order for people to reflect on the past through different perspectives to create a true culture of peace in the future.

As a key measure, we require more investment in education. In the case of El Salvador, a minimum of 6% of the GDP must be invested in education. We must also promote a stronger link between the environment, agriculture, nature and the school, both in curricular content and the design of buildings. Technology must be considered a supporting resource, not part of the school content. In other words, technology must be actively used to provide proper education to each student and each community, to support the teachers, etc. Another important factor is linking the school to a long-term view of employment and productivity. This requires a vision of entrepreneurship, company building, knowledge of the

country's legal frameworks, among other factors. It also implies the improvement of higher levels of education and vocational education.

In order to achieve all these goals, we need to have information about the types of programs that have been successful in places with similar challenges to those faced in El Salvador, such as social-emotional competence programs; the link between school and prevention; and those focused on identifying high risk students and families and the strategies adopted to reduce their vulnerabilities.

4. Recommendations and future



Participants of the Urban Security Exchange. Photo: David Pivaral.

The Urban Security Exchange fostered comprehensive discussion of different topics and aspects related to the reproduction of violence in El Salvador and the Northern Triangle region. It also allowed multiple experiences that addressed the risk factors of violence and the promotion of factors that may contain them.

The Igarapé Institute, its local partners (FOROPAZ and FUNDAUNGO) and international partners (Diálogo Interamericano), along with international cooperation entities (UNDP and USAID) joined efforts to manage this important event, but also to guarantee continuity of this

debate. Recommendations generated during the Exchange involve different national and international agents. From their different backgrounds, they can promote true change in the way violence has been traditionally understood in the region.

The first recommendation is based on the Exchange's pillars: data, design and innovation. Policies must be based on reaction or solution to the most immediate problems. The use of information and evidence is the most powerful input for the design and implementation of measures that can become true innovations in citizen security. This does not imply the abandonment of traditional law enforcement strategies, but adopting more efficient and organized ways of executing the tasks of different security agencies in the country. Here, members of civil society can play an important role, including the support of international cooperation and NGOs, that can produce information and analyses,.

This requires, firstly, a proper balance between the traditional focus of law enforcement – a more assertive police force –, institutional strengthening and the implementation of measures for violence prevention. Strategies like those implemented in El Salvador show that planned prevention can have positive effects. For this, it is necessary to combine law enforcement with a holistic view where prevention is the central aspect, recognizing that reinsertion and rehabilitation play a key role, combined with respect for Rule of Law and human rights. Such transformation must start at the core of local and national politics, with debates at the legislative level and effectively introducing the agendas and principles of the national public institutions.

As we have addressed repeatedly in this report, the over-incarceration in penitentiaries, and the inhuman conditions of those who are deprived of their freedom should be addressed in transformation efforts. It has been demonstrated that criminalization is not the most effective strategy to generate true transformation (besides its deep implications in terms of human rights violations). It is imperative to address the severe humanitarian crises in jails and design a thorough rehabilitation and reinsertion plan for former gang members.

Alternatively, it is necessary to strengthen strategies based on the promotion of employment, education and artistic spaces. Instead of treating them as social services, they should be seen as true strategies for violence prevention integral to the identification of risk and protection factors. The Northern Triangle region and El Salvador have achieved significant advances in this regard. Review of evidence and innovative initiatives play an important role here, as well as the participation of local NGOs, youth, the private sector and the church.

Finally, the need to have a specific focus for population groups who have different experiences with violence is the path to generate true societal transformation and interrupt the cycle of violence. In this context, we consider it paramount to work with the transformation of violent masculinities that reproduce interpersonal violence, including violence against women, putting an end to the permanent stigmatization of vulnerable youth and the economic system that reproduces inequality and social exclusion.

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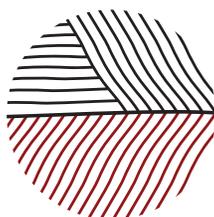
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