

Background Note 2: Framing Contexts and Responses to Armed Violence: Perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean

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There is widespread consensus that violence in Latin America and the Caribbean is reaching epidemic levels and presents a major constraint to development. Rates of homicide have doubled over the past decade with tremendous consequences for human security and wellbeing (WHO 2002; Fajnzylber et al 2000). But it is especially important to generate a clear analytical understanding of the categories, costs and possible entry-points for armed violence prevention and reduction in order to appropriately frame policy discussions and determine priorities. This framework paper introduces a conceptual typology of different ‘categories’ of armed violence to situate this debate. It then turns to a range of tested ‘entry-points’ to armed violence prevention and reduction to stimulate discussion.

An Integrated Approach to Understanding Armed Violence

This paper proposes a general framework to conceptualise armed violence (see Figure 1). Key variables in this typology include different ‘categories’ of armed violence, a treatment of underlying risk factors, the costs of violence and also entry-points for armed violence prevention/reduction actions. In order to ‘diagnose’ armed violence, it is important that the causes and consequences are informed by a comprehensive analysis. Because armed violence programming is comparatively new, such analysis is to date comparatively limited. This paper considers examples of past prevention and reduction interventions from Latin America and the Caribbean – though does not offer evidence of their ‘effectiveness’ in the long-term.

Figure 1. Framing armed violence

Categories	Risk Factors	Costs	Entry-points	Perspectives
<i>Inter-personal</i> (domestic or community/social)	Individual	Direct	Coercive	Criminal Justice
<i>Collective</i> (social or political violence, pre or post-conflict)	Inter-Personal	Indirect	Compliance	Public Health
	Institutional		Voluntary	Conflict Transformation
<i>Criminal</i> (individual or collective economic violence)	Structural				Rights-based
				Citizen Security
<i>Conflict</i> (intense political violence)				Environmental Design
<i>Institutional</i> (state violence)				Social Capital

While the forms that violence takes are inherently complex and multi-faceted, it is possible to identify several **categories** of armed violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. These include: *inter-personal and domestic violence* that can be family-related or take place in the broader community (without criminal or economic intent),

collective violence that is often present in a pre-conflict or post-conflict phase, is socio-political in nature, and involves violence between armed groups (formal or informal), and other political actors, *criminal violence* that is economic in motivation, and can be both organised and informal (individual), *conflict* violence associated with large-scale collective political violence (war), and *institutional* violence, including repression that can range from state-sanctioned social cleansing to vigilantism (categories loosely derived from Moser and McIlwaine, 2005, WHO 2002, Turpin and Kurtz, 1997).

From a policy perspective, these different forms of violence are often present simultaneously, and the categories blur into each other, depending on the context. They are also probably best understood as different aspects of a larger ‘web of violence’ with various forms and manifestations, but often the same underlying causes or risk factors (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997). Conceptualising violence as multi-faceted and diverse emphasizes different forms of violence and highlights ‘power’ asymmetries as both a source and consequence of armed violence.

Although different programmatic and policy strategies are needed for different types of armed violence (such as in pre-conflict or in the context of fragile states or societies, versus post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation), the underlying forms of violence that are being addressed are often the same. It is also worth noting that unstable post-conflict situations are, by definition, also ‘pre-conflict’ situations in which the goal is to avoid conflict recurrence.

Risk factors associated with the onset and lethality of armed violence have been explored through an ‘ecological’ model as well as by public health specialists (WHO 2002). This approach envisions the ‘causes’ of armed violence (perpetration and victimisation) as consisting of a range of factors that radiate out from the individual, to the inter-personal, institutional and structural levels. In focusing on individuals, households and families, such an approach highlights how issues of ‘agency’ and ‘identity’ are themselves shaped by structural causes of armed violence – such as economic, political and social inequality. Put another way, gender, age, ethnicity and race are all important in determining the ‘experience’ of violence – not just underlying factors relating to poverty or under-development. As with the ‘categories’ described above, risk factors associated with armed violence are multi-dimensional and inter-related and demand a host of policy responses.

The **costs and impacts** of armed violence are often closely aligned with the causes and risk factors. The effects of armed violence can be measured in ‘human’ terms – whether in terms of homicide, armed assault, lynching, psychological trauma and other indicators of victimisation – or in purely ‘capital’ terms, including monetary, resource-related, or social costs (described elsewhere as physical, human, natural and social capital). There is a bias among policy makers and practitioners toward measuring ‘tangible’ costs that are easily recorded rather than the more subjective or intangible impacts. For the purpose of conceptual clarity, we propose a typology that distinguishes between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ costs. As noted in the accompanying background paper (*Measuring the Scale and Distribution of Armed Violence*) – direct costs relate to rates of intentional death/injury and the attendant costs associated with medical bills, and damage to personal and household assets. Indirect costs relate to

'excess' death, the costs of care, increased security, and diminished quality of life and long term productivity.

Entry-points to preventing and reducing armed violence are heterogeneous and wide-ranging in their effectiveness. Over the past several decades activities have transformed from a focus on controlling and containing violence to a focus on prevention and reduction. Entry-points range from policy-focused initiatives seeking to categorise and simplify solutions based on isolating causes to others that emphasise diversity and inter-subjective forms of violence and a complex array of interventions. Depending on the 'category' of armed violence, interventions range from coercive top-down strategies targeting/punishing high-risk groups to others that aim to strengthen customary forms of criminal justice and build social capital through neighbourhood groups. Moreover, certain approaches privilege simultaneously a top-down focus on citizen security and infrastructure renewal together with bottom-up strategies that purposefully rebuild social capital and connectivity.

Finally, there are a host of **perspectives** unconsciously adopted by various prevention and reduction interventions. Moser and Mcilwaine (2005) trace these approaches to discrete epistemic or disciplinary traditions. For example, 'criminal justice' approaches focus on violence deterrence and control through reform of judicial, penal and police systems. 'Public health' approaches emphasise prevention and risk reduction through enhanced mortality/morbidity surveillance, risk factor identification and the scaling-up of small-scale interventions. 'Conflict transformation' approaches focus on resolution and negotiation while 'rights-based approaches' highlight legal enforcement and other forms of compliance-based initiatives. More novel interventions highlight 'citizen security' and emphasise state-sponsored multi-sector programmes. Others promote 'environmental design' which examines urban renewal and physical rehabilitation as a way of minimising risks of armed violence. Also, 'social capital-based' interventions include bottom-up activities that promote community responses by rebuilding social institutions.

Reviewing Risk Factors and Impacts of Armed Violence in Latin America/Caribbean

Effective diagnosis and analysis of armed violence in Latin America and the Caribbean requires disaggregation at multiple levels. Obvious categories of armed violence in the region range from 'political' (e.g. paramilitary and guerrilla violence in Colombia and Haiti) to 'economic' (e.g. organised crime in Brazil and Mexico), to social (e.g. gang violence in El Salvador and Jamaica) and institutional (e.g. state violence against opposition groups in Venezuela). But on closer inspection, there is a need to move beyond simple generalisations across and between countries, and deepen analysis at sub-regional, municipal, household and individual levels. This is because many countries exhibit multiple categories of violence simultaneously, even if the forms of victimisation are spatially and demographically varied.

Irrespective of the exact category of armed violence, there are several trends that are repeated between and within countries. For example, there appears to be a tight association between political, economic and social violence – expressed *inter alia* as homicide, victimisation and sexual violence – and *small arms availability and misuse*. In fact, between 70-90 per cent of armed violence in Latin America and the Caribbean

is perpetrated with firearms – a much higher proportional rate than in other parts of the world. The effects of armed violence – particularly homicide and intentional injury – also appear to be *demographically concentrated* among young males between the ages of 15 and 29.

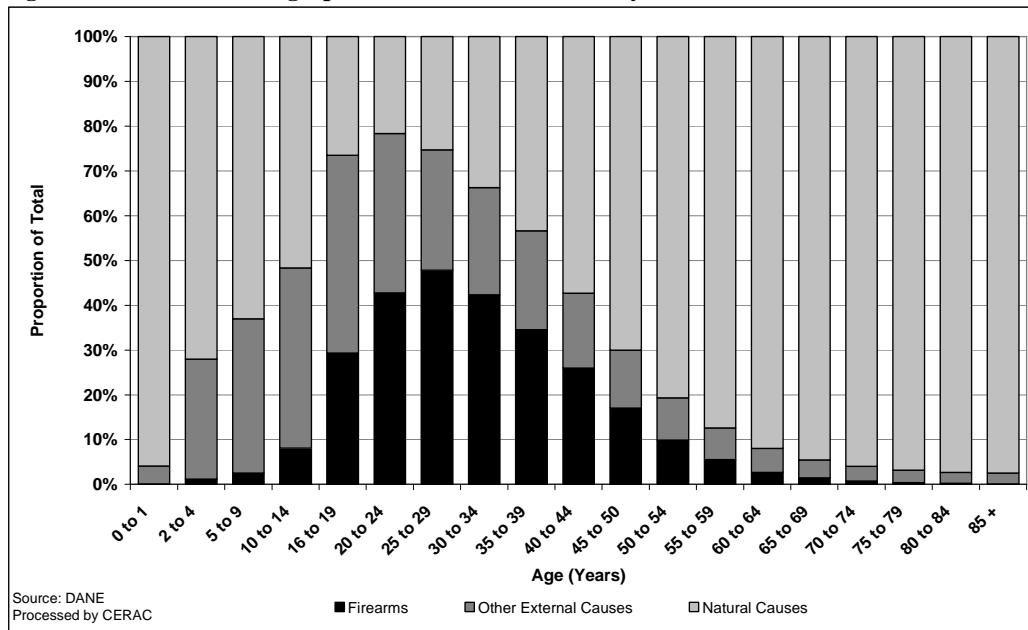
Figure 2. The Scope and Scale of Armed Violence (Homicide) in Latin America and the Caribbean: Some Comparisons (rates per 100,000) – Source: PAHO (2007)

Country	1995	2000	2002
Colombia	91.6	82.9	84.6
Jamaica	...	...	54*
El Salvador	35.7	46.2	43.4
Venezuela	15.6	26	32.4
Brazil	26.6	29.8	31
Virgin Islands (US)	...	27.3	28.8
Guatemala	21.6	...	23.1
Belize	8.9	17.7	22.6
Saint Lucia	9.3	16	20.1
Puerto Rico	22.8	20.2	18.7
Haiti	...	...	18.6
Paraguay	15.6	17.9	18.4
Bahamas	17.3	...	16.4
Ecuador	14	15.1	15.7
Panama	11.1	12.6	13.7
Saint Kitts and Nevis	10.9	...	13
Nicaragua	11.3	11.8	12.3
Dominican Republic	11.2	...	11.1
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	10.3	...	11
Barbados	9.9	10.3	10.5
Trinidad and Tobago	10.5	...	10.5
Virgin Islands (UK)	6.8	...	10.5
Turks and Caicos Islands	7.7	...	8.7
Argentina	5	6.2	7
Cuba	6.1	7.1	7
Costa Rica	5.4	6	6.2
Guyana	5.9	...	5.8
Montserrat	...	...	5.6
Chile	2.9	4.3	5.3
Uruguay	4.8	5.1	5.2
Antigua and Barbuda	...	...	4.8
Peru	6.2	...	4.5
Cayman Islands	5	...	4.3
Dominica	3.1	...	3.8
Suriname	...	...	3
Martinique	...	...	2.7
Grenada	1.8	...	1.6
Guadeloupe	...	...	1.4
Anguilla	...	...	-
Aruba	...	...	...
Bolivia	...	...	...
French Guiana	...	...	...
Netherlands Antilles	...	...	...
Honduras	...	...	...
French Guiana	...	...	...

Data on Jamaica from 2004. Provided by Jamaica Injury Surveillance System (JISS).

The implications for prioritising and targeting prevention and reduction programmes are clear: initiatives should consider the various risk factors influencing ‘high risk groups’ and the role of arms control. Figure 3 makes this point emphatically in the case of Colombia. This is a trend that repeats itself across Latin America and the Caribbean, but also globally.

Figure 3. Colombia: Demographic Distribution of Mortality 1972-2002

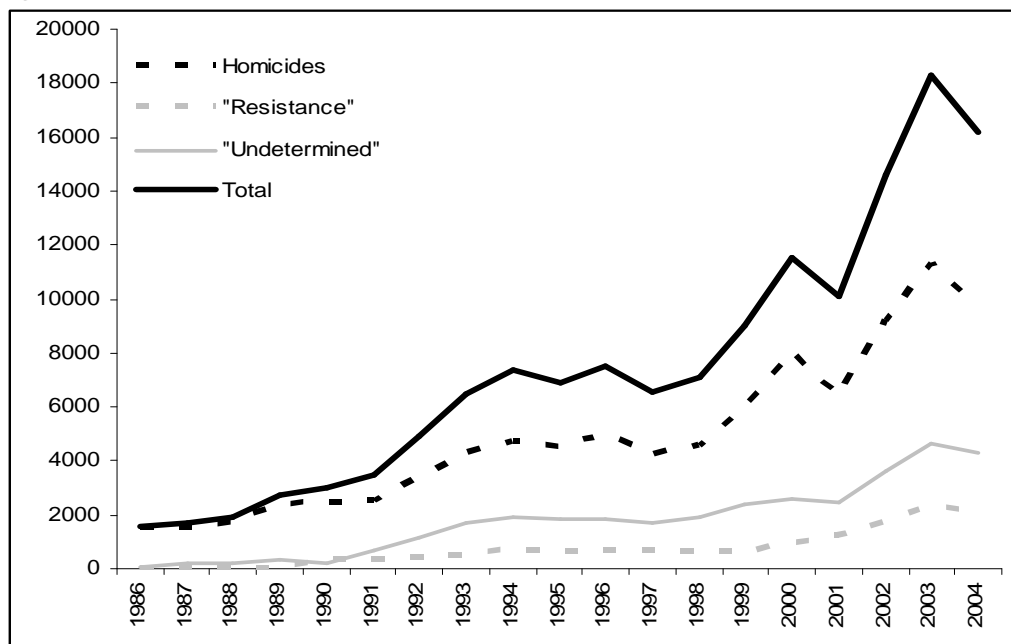


Source: Small Arms Survey (2006)

Another characteristic that repeats itself across Latin America and the Caribbean relates to the common risk factors and impacts of armed violence. For example, rapid urbanisation without employment opportunities, and the social and economic inequality that results, constitutes a structural risk factor exacerbating the onset and virulence of armed violence. The majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries are predominantly urban societies, often growing at rates that are unsustainable and with inadequate social and physical infrastructure to keep pace with demand.

These mass urban sprawls are accompanied by increasing rates of armed violence as Figure 4 below makes clear in the case of Venezuela – a country with massive squatter settlements. There are of course a host of additional structural risk factors that exacerbate levels of violence – including macro-economic shocks, contagion of conflict and crime across borders, persistent unemployment, rapid political transformation, and other issues (Small Arms Survey 2007).

Figure 4. Violent Deaths in Venezuela, 1986-2004



Source: Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas Penales y Criminalísticas (CICPC), Venezuela; Center for Peace and Human Rights of the Central University of Venezuela.

As noted above, there are many ways to estimate the overall burden of armed violence – though the approach advanced here considers ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ costs. For example, it is possible to estimate the total direct burden of armed violence from the a health economics perspective by gathering longitudinal data on the distribution of injuries by type of injury, cost of related services/time, the profile/age of the victim and related lost life or disability adjusted life years (Small Arms Survey 2006). In Haiti, for example, assessing the costs requires examining both public and private hospitals and determining the types of injuries, the vocation of the victims and survivors as Figures 5 and 6 demonstrate.

Figure 5. Distribution of Injuries by type: September 2003 to April 2004 (n=988)

	Trauma	Violent Trauma	Blade	Firearm Limb	Firearm Body	Firearm Head	Firearm Death	Other in-patients	Total Patients
Sep	0	20	6	1	9	2	2	88	119
Oct	2	10	6	2	2	0	1	86	109
Nov	0	18	14	2	1	0	1	105	141
Dec	1	18	37	15	4	1	0	8	84
Jan	0	2	36	45	13	7	8	17	128
Feb	1	12	24	22	23	20	1	3	106
Mar	4	19	35	34	21	11	3	47	174
Apr	7	10	21	15	6	1	0	67	127
Total	15	109	179	136	79	42	16	421	988

Adapted from Muggah (2005)

By drawing together the direct and indirect costs, it is possible to make a more precise accounting of the socio-economic impacts of armed violence. Recent guidelines established by the WHO, together with the CDC/SAS, elaborating a method for costing armed violence drawing on national surveillance and other forms of epidemiological data (Small Arms Survey 2006). In applying the guidelines to data

collected in Brazil and Colombia, it was possible to determine approximate costs of violence of between USD 3 billion (in the case of Colombia) to USD8billion (in Brazil) - or between 0.5 and 1 percent of their respective GDPs.

Table xxx Typology of firearm injuries by vocation: September 2003 to April 2004 (n=988)

Students	Teachers	Police	Security	Commercial	Journalist	Doctor	Priest
48	2	16	3	25	4	0.5	0.5

Adapted from Muggah (2005)

Preventing and Reducing Armed Violence

Though highly varied according to the category and consequences of armed violence, it is possible to assign distinct prevention and reduction activities to a conceptual typology. Interventions can be organized according to their form - whether *coercive, compliance-oriented or voluntary* interventions – and institutional structure, whether *formal or informal*. The combined use of different approaches to monitoring and evaluation - together with defined indicators of armed violence – can improve overall prioritisation of, and spending on, prevention and reduction interventions. Effective urban violence prevention and reduction interventions often apply a combination of all three. ‘Effectiveness’ here implies sustained improvements in objective and subjective indicators of security (McCord, 2003).

Coercive approaches encompass aggressive top-down strategies emphasizing deterrence such as forcible disarmament, cordon and search activities and intelligence-led interventions. In drawing on a criminal justice perspective, these often target high-risk groups such as would-be perpetrators, repeat offenders, ex-combatants and young males affiliated with gangs. In the past, high-profile national crime reduction and citizen security programmes emphasizing repression and police deployment were more likely to secure greater public sympathy and assuage popular anxieties – particularly among elite segments of the population – than low-key voluntary initiatives. An expectation was that muscular police-led operations to ‘crack-down’ on high risk groups – from paramilitaries, militia, gangs and ‘terrorist cells’ to unemployed youth, ‘delinquents’ and others – could generate visible improvements in safety. More recently, the IADB has supported ‘softer’ interventions to strengthen institutional capacity to prevent juvenile violence, enhance police-community relations, improve incarceration capacities, and promote social awareness.

Compliance-based activities seek to encourage changes in behaviour through the threat and enforcement of selective penalties coupled with interventions designed to encourage voluntary participation. They often include decentralized and municipal initiatives emphasising a combination of legislative changes with ‘programmatic’ interventions such as community policing and targeted interventions including alcohol prohibitions and temporary gun bans. Municipal authorities in Latin America and the Caribbean have experimented with such interventions – often through specially designed municipal councils – including innovative approaches to improving the efficiency and public perception of the justice system. UN-supported truth commissions in Guatemala are one example. World Bank-backed community-level projects in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Venezuela and Argentina focused on enhancing access to justice and alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms are another. For example, in Colombia, the *casas de justicia* (houses of justice) were an

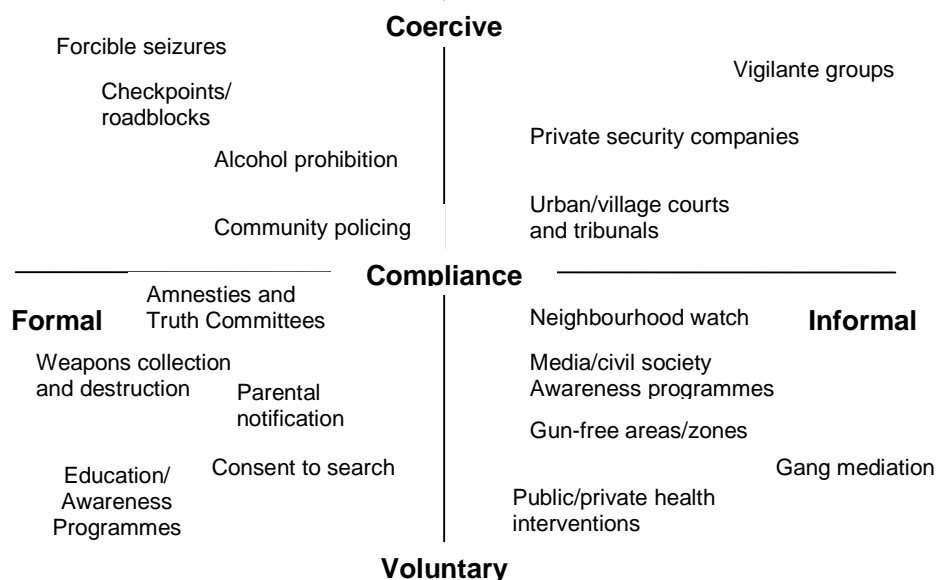
experiment in the decentralization of the courts and increased processing of local cases *in situ*. From the mid-1990s onwards, several *casas* were established in Cali and Bogota, then considered amongst the most violent cities in the country (Small Arms Survey 2006). These entailed the involvement of the office of the District Attorney, Family Violence Intake Centres, Victim Assistance Offices, Forensic Medicine and Prosecution, as well as police oversight and legal aid services, to on-site locations in acutely affected areas.

Meanwhile, ***voluntary interventions*** are designed to encourage bottom-up participation in armed violence prevention and reduction. As such they often include a combination of activities emphasising temporary amnesties, educational and awareness-building initiatives and community-led activities designed to restore/strengthen social capital. There are many examples in Latin America and the Caribbean – notably Brazil, El Salvador and Jamaica – of voluntary interventions designed to reinforce norms associated with tolerance and anti-violence amongst male and female youth in urban environments. For example, local level peace initiatives mediated by municipal authorities, former militia/gang leaders and civil society in Colombia and Haiti’s *favelas* and shanty-towns have yielded positive, though admittedly short-term, results. Some have criticised their potentially limited impact due to the fact that they were not aligned with national structures and processes. In El Salvador – *Homies Unidos* – a non-profit gang violence reduction programme – combined public health approaches and drug education with dialogue and peaceful mediation. In Jamaica, the PALS programme adopted the Foundation for Peace Education model¹ and sought to educate children about conflict resolution and alternatives to gun-violence. In Colombia, voluntary disarmament programmes were bolstered by a deliberate strategy of enhancing a *cultura ciudadana* (citizen culture) and distributing text books in exchange for toy handguns. As a result of these and other interventions, firearm-related homicide and unintentional injury rates reportedly declined among youth segments of the population.

Owing to changing demographics and priorities in rapidly urbanizing contexts, classical approaches to violence prevention and reduction are being forced to adapt. At a minimum, interventions are accommodating a more multi-disciplinary and multi-sector approach than has hitherto been the case (IADB 2003). All three forms of interventions can be formal – that is mandated and organized by the state – or informal – organized and implemented outside the remit of the state (see Figure 6). What is crucial, however, is that any approach to armed violence prevention and reduction be designed in a context-specific fashion whether at regional, country, municipal or community level. The inter-relationships between different categories and risk factors of violence must be carefully analysed.

¹ See, for example, www.peace-ed.org/curricula/.

Figure 6. A Typology of Armed Violence Prevention and Reduction Strategies



Source: Jütersonke, Krause and Muggah. (2007)

Concluding Reflections

Armed violence is complex, endemic and growing in Latin America and the Caribbean. Though data is limited, not comprehensive and seldom comparable, there nevertheless common trends. Male youth are the most common perpetrators and victims of armed violence – and a host of risk factors shape their vulnerability from the individual to the structural level. While macro-level surveillance and monitoring capacities are steadily improving in the region, the most effective approach to building reliable and comparable information and analysis in the short-term will be focused country studies that follow a common template and involve common problem definition between municipal stakeholders. Country and community-specific diagnostics are an essential component of successful prevention and reduction programmes.

Basic trends in the region suggest that in most cases discrete indicators of certain forms of armed violence – particularly homicide rates and victimisation – are rising (e.g. the problem is worsening and data-collection is improving). While macro-level indices presented in this background note provide an indicative overview, it is also important to recognise that such indicators, while useful, can dramatically undercount actual rates. Emphasis on improved surveillance – and also examination of perception-based data, together with grounded longitudinal studies would better highlight changes over time.

There are a range of tested ‘entry-points’ to programming in armed violence prevention and reduction. On the one hand – interventions that focus narrowly on achievable and realistic objectives that are tailored to the local context are more likely to succeed. Multi-sector, public-private, and integrated interventions that combine a

combination of approaches – coercive, compliance-based and voluntary – are also generating important dividends. Interventions that do not engage local actors in meaningful dialogue appear to only register short-term gains. Emphasis on supporting capacities to diagnosis and appropriately assess armed violence – including categories, risk factors and impacts – is a sine qua none of sustainable programming.

Key (and Recent) Sources

Note: this list is not comprehensive, and does not include the vast array of country or local studies, and only includes key overview contributions. It also does not include many Spanish or Portuguese-language sources, although there are many that deal with armed violence issues.

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