

Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment

Annex 2: Guatemala Profile *



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* Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

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Assessment Objectives

This Guatemala Country Profile is part of a broader five-country Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment, initiated by the USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, with support from the USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (DCHA/CMM). The assessment consists of a main report along with five country profiles – El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. The information that informed the Guatemala Country Profile was gathered from interviews conducted during a one-week trip to Guatemala in October of 2005, and from readily available documents and published reports. The Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment had four main objectives:

- To analyze the nature of gangs and identify root causes and other factors driving the phenomenon
- To examine the transnational and regional nature of gangs in Central America, Mexico, including the impact of deportation and immigration trends
- To identify and evaluate policies and programs to address gangs in the five assessment countries and in the United States
- To provide strategic and programmatic recommendations to the LAC Bureau and LAC Missions in the five assessment countries¹

Historical Context

Guatemala's Post-Conflict Woes

When Guatemala signed the Peace Accords in 1996, ending a 36-year civil conflict that left over 200,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands more maimed and internally displaced, the label of “post-conflict country” was officially bestowed on the country. However, the transition from war to peace has not been a painless passage and peace continues to remain elusive. Since the Accords were signed nearly a decade ago, Guatemala has earned the dubious distinction of being one of the most violent countries in the region and in the world, with homicide rates comparable to those in war-torn African countries. According to the Government of Guatemala's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, homicides in the country have risen 40 percent from 2001 to 2004. The homicide rate in Guatemala was 35 per 100,000 people, compared to 5.7 per 100,000 in the United States. The year 2005 did not see an abatement of crime, with the number of homicides through September 2005 at 3,154, already approximately eight percent higher than in all of 2004. Violent crimes as a proportion of total crimes committed have increased in much of Latin America with lower-income areas – particularly those on the

¹ Note that this version of the USAID Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment was edited for public distribution. Certain sections, including specific country-level recommendations for USAID Missions, were omitted from the Country Profile Annexes. These recommendations are summarized in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section of this assessment.

peripheries of cities – suffering from the highest levels of severe violence.² This holds true in Guatemala where Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan – all located on the periphery of Guatemala City – exhibit relatively high levels of violence. High crime rates are impeding economic growth, as businesses shift trade and investment to more secure countries in the region. Public faith in democracy is also threatened by high crime rates as governments are perceived as unable to deliver key services such as public security and justice. According to a 2004 USAID-funded survey on attitudes toward democracy, Guatemalans that perceive insecurity in their communities – even citizens that have not actually been a victim of crime – have less support for the democratic systems and the values that define it. Guatemalans cite crime, along with corruption, as one of their top concerns and high levels of crime is cited as the top justification for a military coup.³

Violence is undeniably not a new phenomenon in Guatemala. The 36-year civil conflict was characterized by high levels of violence, much of it state-sponsored or institutional, the effects of which continue to manifest in the country today. There are significant levels of economic, institutional, and social violence in Guatemala. Organized crime networks exploit the weak rule of law to carry out their illicit businesses of money laundering, kidnapping, and trafficking of narcotics, contraband, weapons, and people. Youth gangs⁴ have emerged on the scene as willing functionaries of these organized crime networks at one end of the spectrum and, at the other end, as their convenient criminal scapegoats. Indeed, since the end of the conflict, “*maras*,” or gangs, have become public enemy number one. Despite the end of the civil conflict, there are still incidents of institutional violence in the country, including police brutality and extra-judicial killing, as the state attempts to respond to mounting pressure to address high crime levels, particularly gang violence. Levels of social violence are also elevated in Guatemala, with a very high incidence of intra-familial violence including domestic abuse, child abuse, and sexual violence, all of which contribute to perpetuating the cycle of violence within successive generations.

Nature of the Gang Phenomenon

There are several theories in circulation that attempt to explain the emergence of gangs in Guatemala and other Central American countries. Some analysts claim that the most notorious gang – Mara Salvatrucha⁵ or MS-13 – originated in El Salvador over three

² Briceno-Leon, R., and V. Zubillaga. 2002. “Violence and Globalization in Latin America.” *Current Sociology* 50 (1): 19-37; Fundacion Mexicana para la Salud/Centro de Economia y Salud 1998. “Analisis de la magnitud y costos de la violencia en la Ciudad de Mexico.” Working Paper R-331, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, DC; Lira, I.S. 2000. “Costo economico de los delitos: Niveles de vigilancia y politicas de seguridad ciudadana en las communes del gran Santiago.” Serie Gestion Publica No. 2, CEPAL, Santiago, Chile; Reyna, C., and E. Toche. “La inseguridad en el Peru.” Serie Politicas Sociales No. 29, CEPAL, Santiago, Chile; Valuar, A. 1999. “Violence Related to Illegal Drugs, Youth, and Masculinity Ethos,” Paper presented at the conference “Rising Violence and the Criminal Justice Response in Latin America: Towards an Agenda for Collaborative Research in the 21st Century,” University of Texas-Austin, May 6-9.

³ Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. *La cultura política de la democracia en Guatemala*, 2004.

⁴ This report uses Dr. Malcolm Klein’s definition of “youth gang,” as being any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its identity.”

⁵ *Mara* means “gang” in Spanish and *Salvatrucha* means “smart/clever Salvadoran.”

decades ago and their membership spread to neighboring Guatemala and Honduras. Another account calls the birth of Guatemalan *maras* a by-product of an urban youth protest movement that first appeared in Guatemala City in the 1960s in response to social injustices and government abuses, and became increasingly violent in the mid-1980s when the clashes with police became common along with looting and bus-burning⁶. One of the more widely accepted explanations traces the origins of gangs in Guatemala back to the wars that seized Central America in the 1970s and 1980s. Many Guatemalans and other Central Americans fled to the United States to escape the turmoil. Many of the children of these immigrants encountered a thriving gang culture and, for various reasons, joined these gangs. When the Central American wars began to wane in the early to mid 1990s, the United States deported thousands of convicted, jailed gang members to Central America at the end of their sentences. These deportees found themselves suddenly forced to eke out a new life in a country that was nearly or completely foreign to them. Jobless and, in many cases, unable to speak Spanish, these returnees began to replicate the social structure and economic base that had served them well in the United States – the gang. They set up new gangs in Guatemala and other Central American countries, which have now evolved into their own particular strains, though many have maintained strong links to gangs in the United States.

The problem of gang violence is of particular concern to Guatemala's future since it impacts a critical segment of the population – the youth. Youth under the age of 18 comprise nearly half of the country's population. Many studies have correlated the "youth bulge" factor with increased potential for violence.⁷ The majority of gang members in Guatemala are under 24 years of age. The average age of gang recruits appears to be on the decline, with youth as young as eight years old now joining gangs and serving low-level functions such as serving as *banderas*, or "look-outs," and drug distributors in their *barrios*. Similar to other countries in the region, estimates of the number of gang members in Guatemala vary widely, ranging from 14,000⁸ to 165,000. This reflects the weaknesses and limitations of data collection systems in the country, where data varies by source and where police and judicial data systems are plagued by consistent underreporting. According to the National Civilian Police, there are 340 *maras* in Guatemala and the localities with the greatest gang presence are Zones 6, 7, 12, 18, and 21 in Guatemala City, along with Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan on the periphery. The two largest youth gangs in Guatemala are the *Mara Salvatrucha 13* (MS-13) gang, with members comprising approximately 80 percent of the total number of gang members in the country, and 18th Street (*Barrio 18*), whose members comprise about 15 percent, and the remaining five percent making up other smaller, copycat gangs.⁹ The majority of gang members are male, and young men are both more likely to be victims of gang violence, as well as perpetrators. While there are females in male-

⁶ "Faces of Violence" study, World Vision International, 2002.

⁷ Goldstone, Jack A. 1991. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Fuller, Gary A. and Forrest R. Pitts. 1990. "Youth Cohorts and Political Unrest in South Korea." *Political Geography Quarterly* 9: 9-22.

⁸ The FBI estimates the number at 14,000 based on data from the Guatemala National Civilian Police.

⁹ Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

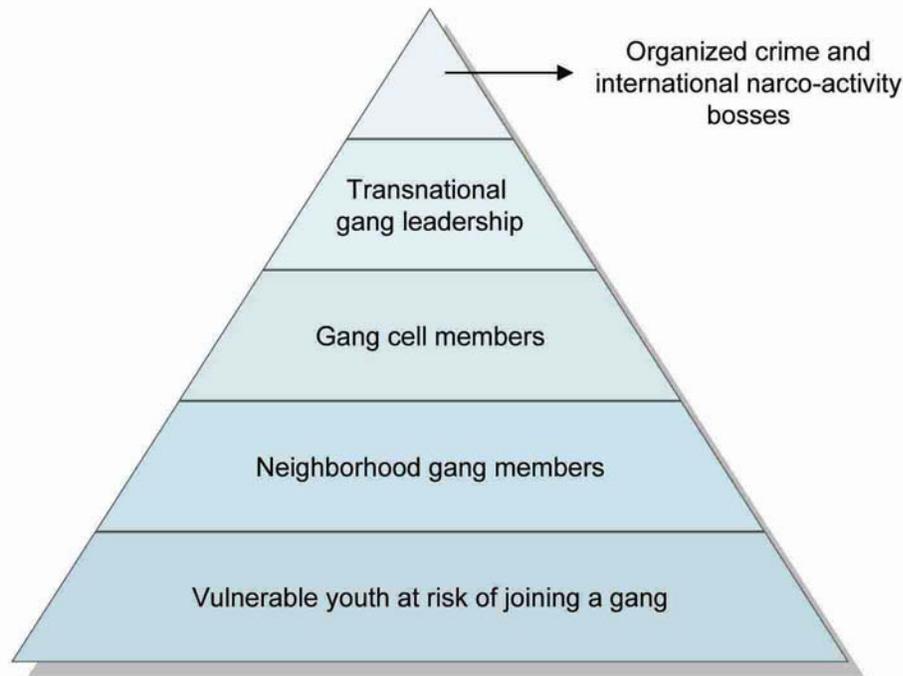
dominated gangs, their role within these is subordinate and sexual exploitation of women by male gang members is common.

One Mara Does Not Fit All

Gangs and gang members in Guatemala are not homogenous. There is no single typology applicable to every gang or gang member. Not all gangs have the same objectives, nor engage in the same type of activity nor with the same degree of violence. The pyramid below reflects the various types of gangs, and their different objectives, that currently operate in Guatemala. While the pyramid does not capture the level of diffusion and complexity of gang structures and organized crime networks (for example, there is significant variation within each strata of the pyramid), the pyramid does provide a general understanding of the various groupings of gangs and their relation to organized crime networks and the broader at-risk youth population. One characteristic that appears to hold true for all gangs is their extreme cohesiveness and loyalty to the gang, which is a function of their “oppositional culture”;¹⁰ that is, gang activity is defined by their opposition to rival gangs and, similar to other groups ranging from military troops to sports teams, they band together more intensely in the face of opposition or adversity.

The different types of gangs reflected in each strata of the pyramid are described in greater detail here.

¹⁰ Klein, Malcolm. Extract from Professor Klein’s statements during conference entitled “*Voices from the Field: Local Initiatives and New Research on Central American Youth Gang Violence*,” February 23, 2005, organized by the Due Process of Law Foundation, the Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence, and the Pan-American Health Organization.



Organized Crime and International Narco-Activity Bosses (international): The top block of the pyramid represents the highest levels—the leadership—of organized crime and narco-activity networks. Most analysts do not believe that there is a direct ascension from street or neighborhood gangs to organized crime, yet this leadership works closely with the leadership of the most sophisticated transnational gangs. In general, these bosses do not have communication with members below the regional and national levels.

Transnational Gang Leadership (regional): This block represents the leaders of 18th Street, MS-13, or other gangs with international presence. These individuals oversee well-connected cells with extensive communication networks that are engaged in extortion and support drug and arms trafficking through territorial control of specific *barrios* (neighborhoods), or of other places such as nightclubs. When detained, many have lawyers who are able to help them avoid prison sentences.

Gang Cell Members (national): At this level, 18th Street or MS-13 *clickas* (cells) are involved in lower-level trafficking and have lesser territorial control over *barrios*. These gang members may be involved in extortion, such as the collection of *impuestos de guerra* (war taxes) from bus and taxi drivers and small businesses owners, and they often carry out orders from regional leaders. They often receive special privileges in prison from other gang members when detained. These members communicate up to the bosses and down to the lower level members.

Neighborhood Gang Members (local): *Maras de Barrio* (neighborhood gangs) are not necessarily members of 18th Street or MS-13 gangs, but they may imitate these two gangs. They often fight for territorial control over *barrios*, have tattoos, consume alcohol and drugs such as crack, and carry homemade arms or arms in many cases acquired through robbery of private security guards. These gangs typically comprise youths from marginal neighborhoods. They do not receive special privileges from other gang members while in prison and are often viewed as illegitimate by gang members who consider themselves true members of specific gang *clickas*.

Vulnerable Youths at Risk of Joining a Gang: This group represents the largest segment of the population – youth between the ages of 8 and 18 that are vulnerable to joining a gang because their lives are characterized by several risk factors, which are explained in greater detail in a later section entitled *Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity*. The majority of youth in this group are poor, ladino, and live in marginalized urban areas. These youth represent the lowest level of the gang supply chain. This group can be further broken into three subsets. The first group of at-risk youth are often referred to as “simpatizantes,” or sympathizers. This group includes at-risk youth who are exposed to gang activity, may have a relative who is in a gang, are somewhat familiar with certain aspects of gang culture (e.g., gang symbols, graffiti), and often display allegiance to one gang over another; that is, they are sympathetic to one particular gang, but have not been officially inducted, or “jumped into” a gang. This group is perceived to be the group of youth most at risk of making the decision to join a gang. The second group of at-risk youth, often referred to as “aspirantes,” or aspirants, includes often the youngest youth who have some exposure to gang activity but have not yet become very familiar with specifics of gang culture. With continued exposure, this group of youth will become well-versed and more sympathetic to gang life. Finally, the third and largest subset includes the broader at-risk youth population that includes youth living predominantly in poor, urban areas without access to education, employment, and other opportunities. While this group has not yet been exposed to any significant level of gang activity, the likelihood does exist that they will be drawn to gang life in the future if their basic needs such as income and fulfilling social ties are not satisfied in other ways. Making a clear distinction between these subsets is critical in order to be able to target activities to prevent full-fledged gang membership.

Gang structures in Guatemala are not static. Gangs appear to have a very strong adaptive capacity and are able to readily evolve to changing political, economic, and social contexts. For example, in response to stepped up state efforts to arrest gang members in Guatemala and other countries, the face of gangs has evolved. Some gang members are getting fewer tattoos and wearing atypical attire to make their identification more difficult. In addition, globalization has not neglected gangs, as they are increasingly using more sophisticated communication techniques (i.e. cell phones, websites) and more advanced weaponry. More advanced communication is making gang activity more efficient and more public. Whereas the earlier strains of gangs, formed in the early-mid 1990s, began as neighborhood gangs that served primarily social functions (giving youth an identity) or economic functions (lower level robbery to generate income), gangs are becoming more sophisticated and the nature of crimes of certain gangs is becoming more

violent. Beheadings, for example, are becoming increasingly common. Gangs in Guatemala, specifically the MS-13 and 18th Street gangs, are becoming progressively more transnational with communication taking place between gang members within Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the United States. Deportation, fluid migration across country borders, and the Internet and cell phone revolutions have all inevitably resulted in the transnationalization of gangs.

Costs and Impacts of Gang Activity

The costs and impacts of gang activity on Guatemala's development can be categorized into three general areas – impacts on economic, social, and democratic/political development, many of which are interrelated and overlap.

Impacts on Economic Development

- **Deterred Trade and Investment.** While up-to-date country-level data is limited, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has made notable headway in measuring the costs of violence in the Latin American and Caribbean region. In measuring the costs of violence, the IDB considers four cost categories¹¹ – *direct costs* (i.e. health system, police, justice system, housing, social services); *indirect costs* (i.e. higher morbidity and mortality due to homicides, suicides, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and depressive disorders); *economic multiplier effects* (i.e. macroeconomic impacts and impacts on the labor market and intergenerational productivity); and *social multiplier effects* (i.e. impact on interpersonal relations and the quality of life). Using this classification, the IDB estimates that violence in Latin America costs the region an estimated 14.2 percent of GDP. While data specific to Guatemala for all of the aforementioned cost categories is scarce, per the table below, the economic costs of crime (not just gang violence) in Guatemala in 1999 were estimated to be 565.4 million dollars, with violent crime exerting a more costly toll than non-violent crime¹². It is estimated that firms in Guatemala suffer average losses of about \$5,500 annually due to crime.¹³

¹¹ Inter-American Development Bank, 2000b. "Economic and Social Consequences of Violence." *Technical Notes on Violence Prevention*, Note 4, Social Development Division. Washington, DC.

¹² Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Rubio, M, "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

¹³ Ibid.

Incident	Estimated Loss (in millions of Quetzals)	\$ Equivalent (in millions)
Robbery without violence	1,925.80	250
Armed assault	2	304
Threat, extortion, or blackmail	341.3	8.7
Physical aggression	15.9	2
Sexual attack	3.9	0.5
Total	4,353.80	565.4

Source: Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa, 2002.

- Privatization of Security.** Guatemala has experienced an extensive proliferation of private security firms in the last several years as wealthier businesses and citizens alike are increasingly relying on the private sector to address security needs that the state cannot fulfill. According to a national victimization survey conducted in 2000, 7.1 percent of households pay for their own private security.¹⁴ In that year, the total budget for private spending on security was at least 20 percent greater than the public security budget and amounted to approximately \$3.5 million.¹⁵ In Guatemala, there are currently approximately 80,000 private security guards compared to 18,500 police. Of the 180 private security companies in the country, only 28 are legal. Oversight of these private companies is negligible, with a total of eight police tasked with providing oversight to all. Without sufficient controls in place, the potential of these private security firms to be exploited by organized criminal networks is considerable. There are a number of concerns related to the growth of the private security sector. First, significant resources are being invested in this sector which results in overall productivity losses. Second, the poor, by virtue of not being able to afford private security, increasingly become targets of crime and gang violence. This is reflected through the extortion rings that exploit poor “barrios,” and, according to one U.S. State Department official, have resulted in upward of 100,000 thousand dollars of “war taxes” being extorted annually from local businesses, bus/taxi drivers, and schoolchildren in poor neighborhoods.¹⁶ In addition, the poor sometimes end up relying on gangs or vigilante justice for personal security since they cannot afford private security and have extremely low confidence in the state’s ability to provide effective and just security. According to the 2004 USAID attitudinal survey, 31 percent of Guatemalans believe that taking justice into one’s own hands is an acceptable response.¹⁷

¹⁴ Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Arriagada and Godoy, 2000. “Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction.” Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

¹⁷ Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura política de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.

Impacts on Social Development

- **Stigmatization and Victimization of Youth.** Given that the majority of gang members are youth associated with poor, urban areas, several individuals interviewed claimed that a stereotype has emerged, fueled in large part by the media, wherein youth from poor, urban areas are by default associated with gangs. As a result, they are often victims of discrimination, leaving a large segment of the population (poor urban youth) with unequal access to employment and community and social structures. For example, anecdotal evidence reveals that youth are often denied jobs based on their residential address alone. The exclusion of this key segment of society could have adverse long-term effects on Guatemala's development. As the USAID Youth and Conflict Toolkit aptly states, "a deprived, frustrated, or traumatized youth cohort, if left without help, can continue to foment violent conflict for decades."¹⁸
- **Weakening of Social Capital.** Increased perceptions of insecurity have resulted in a growing unwillingness of citizens to participate in community affairs and a high level of distrust in other community residents. According to a 2004 survey,¹⁹ 44 percent of Guatemalans believe that "few to no people are trustworthy." Regarding perceptions of insecurity, 86 percent of Guatemalans surveyed feel that the level of insecurity facing Guatemala presents a threat to the future well-being of the country, and 45 percent feel that insecurity poses a threat to their own personal security. Interestingly, while *perceptions* of insecurity are relatively high, actual crime victimization is much lower, with only 13 percent of those surveyed having been actual victims of a crime. Thus, it is the perception of insecurity that is taking the greatest toll on the lives of Guatemalans, as many are afraid to even walk the streets of their neighborhoods despite not having been a victim of crime. This is particularly true of Guatemalans living in urban areas. This weakens the base of social capital in a community which in turn fuels the growth of crime and violence, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. This phenomenon is most intense in the urban context, where social capital tends to be weaker.

Impact on Democratic Political Development

- **Reduced Public Faith in Democracy.** Guatemalans are becoming increasingly frustrated with the government's inability to provide public security and justice for its citizens. This is empowering politicians to support the use of heavy-handed approaches to address gangs to attract votes, often at the expense of democratic values such as human rights and due process. Unless crime levels are

¹⁸ USAID Youth and Conflict Toolkit for Intervention; USAID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance.

¹⁹ Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. La cultura política de la democracia en Guatemala, 2004.

considerably abated over the next year, the issue of crime and gang violence will likely be at the center of the political platform of the next Presidential election in the Fall of 2007. With crime topping the list of citizens' concerns, there is a strong likelihood of candidates running on a hard-line, heavy-handed approach to crime.

- **Diverting of Resources from Critical Development Sectors.** As governments ratchet up efforts to combat gang violence, other developmental needs suffer such as investments in health, education, and water. The Government of Guatemala, in an effort to have a visible impact that will produce results in the short term, has resulted in a disproportionate investment in short-term efforts vis-à-vis long term development needs. This has resulted in the root causes of gang violence being left largely unaddressed, while the state invests primarily in short-term, more politically attractive, law enforcement efforts. Guatemala already owns the unenviable title of lowest public investment in social services, and the lowest tax collection base, in the Central America region. However, there are rumors circulating that the Government is considering levying a new "security tax" on Guatemalans to finance public security needs. Thus, a further diversion of resources away from the basic citizen needs is of great concern.
- **Media Sensationalism.** Not unlike many other countries in the world, the media in Guatemala is equally guilty of sensationalizing and focusing disproportionately on violence, to the neglect of other important social issues. However, not all violence in Guatemala is considered equally worthy of media attention. The more visible crimes, such as gang violence, receive significantly more media attention than less visible violence such as intra-familial violence including child and/or sexual abuse. Organized crime, which arguably has much higher-scale and more damaging effects on the country, is also given much less attention than gang violence, the reluctance perhaps being a function of perceived and actual state involvement. This has two important consequences. First, the information the public receives through the print and broadcast media paints an inaccurate picture of violence in Guatemala – one in which gangs are seemingly responsible for a greater proportion of violence than they actually are. The resulting high visibility of gang violence in the public sphere, relative to other types of violence, contributes to high levels of fear and insecurity among citizens. Second, the portrayal of gang violence in the media has the unintended consequence of glamorizing violence to youth not yet in gangs as well as to gang members themselves. Anecdotal evidence reveals that gangs often compete for the media spotlight, with each rival gang trying to outdo the other by committing increasingly more violent acts.
- **Deterioration of State-Citizen Relationship in Poor, Urban Areas.** As gangs exert their control over local *barrios* which are largely poor and urban (and vastly more insecure than the wealthier urban areas that can afford costly private security) governments, in response – often with support from donors – focus their efforts on strengthening law enforcement and exerting control to quell the

violence and dismantle gang networks in these targeted areas. This has important consequences. As police step up efforts in these poor, marginalized areas, what was already a relationship of mutual fear and distrust between police and communities in these areas is exacerbated. Many citizens increasingly feel that they are being targeted rather than protected by the police. The history of conflict in Guatemala, characterized by high levels of state-sponsored violence, ensured that it would take generations to mend a troubled relationship between state security forces and citizens. However, as the government increases the police presence in marginalized areas to combat gangs, this is instilling a greater level of alarm than confidence in the citizenry. The state-youth relationship is the most disturbing. Whereas anti-establishment, anti-state sentiments among adolescent and teenage youth is common across the world, what distinguishes and exacerbates these feelings of animosity in youth in poor, urban areas in Guatemala is that most of these youth have never experienced a single positive interaction with the state. Often, their only view of the state is the police officers that make arrests and incarcerate individuals. Often, this is the only view that police forces have of themselves. Until state authorities and communities can begin to see each other as allies – a relationship that must be based on mutual beneficial actions – this poor relationship will continue, or deteriorate.

- **Enabling Environment for Institutional and Extra-Judicial Violence.** As police are pressured by the government and the public to bring gang violence under control in poor, marginalized, urban areas, a few key factors converge which create an enabling environment for increased institutional and extra-judicial violence. First, media sensationalism and the resulting stigmatization of all youth from poor neighborhoods as associated with gangs creates a mentality within the police that places the state on the side of “good” and all gang members and “suspected” gang members as “evil.” This can result in increasing levels of police brutality and extra-judicial killings as well as increasing levels of violence against police as communities increasingly view the police as their enemy. Second, the focus of the police is on the number of arrests, while the collection of proper and sufficient evidence, along with due process, become secondary priorities. Third, as the public becomes increasingly frustrated with high levels of crime, their support for extra-judicial measures, also referred to as “social cleansing,” increases, lending a dangerous level of legitimacy to the human rights and due process violations committed by the state. In Guatemala, a number of corpses were discovered in and around Guatemala City in 2000, with signs of torture and violent death. Nearly all of the corpses were young males, many with gang-style tattoos, leading some to suspect the government of a social cleansing operation.²⁰ If perceptions of government involvement in the execution of gang members and suspected gang members are common among citizens in gang violence-ridden areas, so is the belief that such acts are justified in dealing with public enemy number one. While the Government of Guatemala is firm in its

²⁰ Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from US Department of State, 2001b. “Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction.” Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

denial that any such social cleansing policy exists, authorities do acknowledge that such acts may have occurred but that they are isolated events. Such acts of extra-judicial killing are often extremely difficult to prove since, first, it is relatively easy for police to blame such deaths on inter-gang disputes and, second, victims and family members of victims are often too afraid to report such violations for fear of reprisal by the police.

- **Oversaturated and counterproductive prisons.** As the state increases the number of gang-related arrests, an already saturated prison system is becoming even more overwhelmed. There are currently approximately 576 gang members in the Guatemalan prison, of which 18 are women. The majority of these (approximately 289) are in the Escuintla prison, characterized by severe overcrowding and inadequate facilities.²¹ Currently, all gangs are held in the same facility, increasing the risk of intra-gang violence as was experienced in August 2005 with the massacre of several 18th Street gang members by rival MS-13 gang members. With members of the same gang sharing cells, prisons have evolved into graduate schools or training camps for gang members. Rehabilitation programs for imprisoned gang members are nonexistent and prisons are egregiously insecure, with communication, weapons, and drugs flowing easily in and out of prisons.

Causes and Risk Factors of Gang Activity

While gang activity impacts Guatemala's development on several levels, it is, above all else, a symptom. A number of factors, socioeconomic and contextual, create an enabling environment for gang activity to flourish in Guatemala. These include:

Socioeconomic Factors

- **Marginal urban enclaves.** While rural Guatemala is by no means crime-free, crime levels, narco-activity, and gang activity are most intense in urban and peri-urban areas of Guatemala. Lack of jobs in rural areas and the search for a better life have brought many rural-born Guatemalans to urban and peri-urban areas that are expanding rapidly and uncontrolled. Rapid urbanization has concentrated the demographic group most inclined to violence – unattached young males. Gang members themselves largely come from poor, marginalized, urban areas, and are products of an environment characterized by overwhelmed and ineffective service delivery, social exclusion and weak social capital, disintegrated families, overcrowded living conditions, and greater population density. In 2000, the average number of children per household in poor urban areas of Guatemala was nearly five.²² This has resulted in large families, often headed by single mothers that must work excessively long hours outside of the home to sustain their large

²¹ Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

²² INE-MECOVI. Encuesta Nacional Sobre Condiciones de Vida, ENCOVI. 2000.

families. Fathers are scarce and where they are a part of the family, alcoholism and domestic abuse are common. As families struggle to fulfill their most basic needs (food, shelter, electricity), other needs are neglected such as the development of healthy emotional bonds between parent and child and the transfer of positive values from parent to child.

- **Large numbers of unemployed youth.** The youth bulge in Guatemala, accompanied by joblessness, is creating a dangerous situation wherein large numbers of youth desperately in need of income turn to gangs to fill the economic void. Many gang members in Guatemala are the primary or secondary breadwinners of their families, making the economic pull of gangs particularly potent. The urban informal economic sector has provided both licit and illicit means for surviving in spite of a lagging formal economy. The high level of unemployment is both a function of the lack of jobs available due to a struggling economy and the inability of youth to obtain existing jobs due to lack of education. Education levels in Guatemala are dismal with only one percent of all children enrolled in primary school finishing secondary school. Since the Peace Accords, the Government's focus has been nearly entirely on primary education, with 90 percent of primary schools funded by the government. By contrast, 80 percent of secondary schools are private, and thus unaffordable to the poor. In addition to quantity, the quality of education is equally drab. As one individual the Team interviewed stated, "Primary schools in Guatemala are useless. These schools train youth for one profession alone – teaching; yet there are 50,000 unemployed teachers in Guatemala today."
- **Poverty and Inequality.** Although contrary to popular belief, poverty is not the primary cause of crime and violence, it is one of several key factors. The poor are disproportionately impacted by gang violence. First, they are often targeted since they are unable to afford private security. In many poorer Guatemalan neighborhoods, gangs are involved in extortion by forcing, upon threat of violence, local businesses such as taxi/bus drivers and small business owners to pay "*impuestos de guerra*," or "war taxes." Second, the youth directly suffer the effects of poverty, which include unemployment, poor education, and minimal access to high quality services. This is particularly significant for Guatemala, where inequality in income and access to services is enormous and where more than half of the population lives in poverty and nearly a quarter live in extreme poverty.²³ While poverty is undeniably an important factor, Guatemala illustrates the importance of being cautious about labeling poverty as the singular cause of violence. A study revealed that departments in Guatemala with the highest levels of violence are those with higher literacy levels, fewer households living in extreme poverty, a higher Ladino population than indigenous, and largely urban. Conversely, departments with lower homicide rates were likely to have higher

²³ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

indigenous populations, lower literacy levels, more extreme household poverty, and rural.²⁴

- **High levels of intra-familial violence.** There is a cycle of violence in motion in Guatemala. Levels of intra-familial violence, including sexual violence, spouse abuse, and child abuse are extremely high and, in many cases, are fueled by alcohol and/or drug abuse. Compounding the problem is the societal norm of keeping quiet about such violence which perpetuates the problem, results in gross underreporting to authorities, and contributes to a general lack of resources for families – women in particular – to effectively deal with the issue. Intra-familial violence is inextricably linked to youth gang violence, with an extremely high percentage of gang members reporting coming from disintegrated families with some level of intra-familial violence.
- **Minimal state presence.** Guatemala suffers from the region’s lowest public investment in social services and lowest tax collection base (less than 10 percent of GDP) from which to fund these investments. Guatemala scores consistently low on the United Nations’ Human Development Indices including infant mortality, life expectancy, and literacy. Service delivery in poor, urban areas is increasingly characterized by increased law enforcement efforts to make arrests, but much less so by improvements in service delivery in the areas of health, education, and other critical social services. For example, in Villa Nueva, where intra-familial violence is a major problem, there is a not a single government-funded program to address it.
- **Drug consumption.** Drug consumption is practically a given with gang members. Guatemala’s position as a trans-shipment point for narco-trafficking ensured the eventual emergence of a domestic drug consumption problem. Crack, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, and alcohol are easy to obtain in most poor, urban neighborhoods in Guatemala, particularly in those where narco-traffickers and gangs have exerted control over local drug markets. The drug trade is linked to inter-gang violence to control the drug market in local *barrios*. Drugs are often the motive behind robberies and assaults to purchase drugs, intra-family quarrels between drug users and their families, and the murder of drug addicts by “social cleansing” groups.²⁵
- **Deportation and migration.** Deportation of convicted gang members and illegal aliens from the United States into Guatemala, post-conflict return migration, and migration within Central America are key factors that have contributed to a growing problem of gang violence in Guatemala and in the United States. According to the State Department, during the 2004-5 period, the United States

²⁴ Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Centro de Investigaciones Economicas Nacionales. “Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction.” Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

²⁵ Moser, Caroline and McIlwaine, C. 1999. “Participatory Urban Appraisal and its Application for Research on Violence.” *Environment and Urbanization* 11 (2): 203-26.

deported 9,487 Guatemalans, 2,210 of which had a criminal record. There are few services provided to non-criminal deportees or returning migrants and none provided to criminal deportees, including convicted gang members. In addition, in response to newly enacted anti-gang legislation in El Salvador and Honduras, there is evidence that Salvadoran and Honduran gang members are migrating to Guatemala to avoid their own countries' harsher penalties against gang members.

Contextual Factors

- **Legacy of conflict and violence.** The violent, oppressive civil conflict, which pitted state against citizen and killed over 200,000 Guatemalans, did not end with the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. The survivors inherited a legacy of institutional violence, hostility, and injustice that continues to affect the daily lives of Guatemalans. There exists a widespread acceptance in Guatemala that violence is an acceptable means of resolving conflict and Guatemalans do not have faith in the state's ability to provide anything other than partial and arbitrary justice. The conflict also ensured a high level of availability and possession of arms among the populace.
- **Weak, ineffective, corrupt police, criminal, and judicial systems.** The justice and security sectors in Guatemala are weak, corrupt, overwhelmed, and neglected. The judicial system currently does not have the capacity to deal with gang violence. Judicial impunity has emboldened organized criminal entities and gangs. Guatemala is also plagued with a shortage of judges, which is a particularly serious problem since the law states that every case must be presented before a judge within six hours of arrest. The result is that individuals generally end up spending days in pre-trial detention before ever seeing a judge. Pre-trial detention centers are often in worse conditions than the prisons and themselves present recruitment opportunities for gangs and organized criminal elements. The conviction rate is less than ten percent for all cases where a complaint is filed. Police suffer from weak capacity, lack of equipment and, due to extremely poor police investigative capacity, police use "*flagrancia*" – or "catching someone in the act" – as primary grounds for arrest. As a result, many of those arrested end up going free due to lack of evidence. In many cases, police send those they arrest immediately to pre-trial detention, which is illegal without an order from a judge. Perceptions of the justice sector and police are dismal. According to a 2004 survey, 73 percent of those surveyed who live in metropolitan areas in Guatemala believe that the police are directly involved in crime, leaving only 27 percent who believe that the police actually protect them.²⁶ Similarly, Guatemalans have the lowest level of confidence in their country's justice system than every other country in the region.²⁷

²⁶ Seligson, Mitchell A. of Vanderbilt University and Azpuru, Minora of the Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales. *La cultura política de la democracia en Guatemala*, 2004.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

- The *juvenile justice system*, which is the most relevant given that gang members are predominantly youth, exhibits a number of weaknesses. The law states that police must send youth to the *Fiscalia de Menores*, who makes the determination whether to press charges or follow an alternative course such as recommending enrollment in a rehabilitation program. If the *Fiscalia* (Attorney General's Office) chooses to press charges, then the youth is sent to the *Juzgado de Ninez y Juventud* (Children's and Youth's Court) who directs that the youth be sent to pre-trial detention or prison, where the youth then awaits trial and sentencing by a judge. Unlike adults, judges are authorized to give juveniles alternative sentencing, such as "*libertad vigilada*," or surveilled liberty. In addition, the judge can order that a youth be placed in custody of a relative or an NGO-administered, government program instead of pre-trial detention. However, defense lawyers generally do not have confidence in the effectiveness of these options since NGO capacity is weak and they lack the ability to keep tabs on youth in their programs at all times. Similarly, oversight of youth when they are in custody of a relative is minimal and youth may run away or worse, get killed. While juvenile detention centers are not as overcrowded as adult prisons, they similarly suffer from insecurity and violence. In August of 2005, a number of gang members were massacred by a rival gang that broke into the detention center.
- *The Ley de Proteccion Integral de Ninez y Adolescencia* (Law of Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents), enacted in 2003, was inspired by the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child and transformed the way youth transgressors were being treated. Its intention was not to reduce penalties, but rather create more stiff and certain penalties. Under the law, youth under 12 years of age cannot be charged with a crime. Many believe that this law, which essentially gives impunity to youth under the age of 12, is the motivation behind the steady falling age of youth being recruited by gangs.
- **Access to small arms.** The availability of arms in Guatemala and other Central American countries is closely tied to the armed conflicts that engulfed the region in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the conflict, very few weapons have been taken out of circulation. Approximately two million arms are estimated to be in the hands of 36 percent of the civilian population.²⁸ Of these, only approximately 253,500 are legally registered, according to the National Civilian Police. In addition, organized criminal groups are believed to have imported large quantities of arms.²⁹ Finally, the rapidly growing number of private security firms in the country has also increased the number of firearms in Guatemala.

²⁸ Moser, Caroline and Winton, Ailsa. 2002, extracted from Arriagada and Godoy, 1999. "Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework for Violence Reduction." Working Paper 171, Overseas Development Institute.

²⁹ Ibid, extracted from Rodriguez and de Leon, 2000.

- **Narco-Activity.** The international drug trade is closely connected to gang activity in Guatemala. Guatemala serves as a critical point of trans-shipment of drugs originating in Colombia and destined for United States markets, which has created thriving narco-trafficking and organized crime networks in the country. As a result, there is a constant flow of drugs entering Guatemala which has given rise to high levels of drug consumption and addiction in the country, which in turn is linked to a rise in gang and other violence.

Current Responses to Gangs in Guatemala

Like its neighbors, the Government of Guatemala has not yet developed a comprehensive national plan to address the various dimensions of the gang problem including prevention, intervention, and law enforcement. Currently, government investments to address the gang problem overwhelmingly favor short-term law enforcement efforts, to the neglect of long term prevention-oriented programs that address the root causes of the problem. While some donors and nongovernmental organizations have attempted to fill some of these gaps by implementing prevention-oriented programs that address the risk factors for gang involvement and intervention programs that work directly with former gang members, such programs are few and scattered.

Although there are clear gaps and imbalances in the government's approach to dealing with gangs, the government has taken some critical steps that could have a positive impact on reducing gang violence in the country. Below is a more descriptive review and assessment of some ongoing initiatives of government, civil society, and other donors that directly or indirectly impact the gang phenomenon in Guatemala.

Government Response

Like his Presidential counterparts, Tony Saca in El Salvador and Mel Zelaya (and former President Ricardo Maduro) in Honduras, President Oscar Berger was elected in 2003 after a successful campaign that put tackling crime and corruption at the center of his political platform. Like his neighbors, President Berger inherited a country with its share of demons, including high levels of public sector corruption, rising crime levels, a weak and partial judicial system, a distressed tax base, a sluggish economic growth rate, and substantial social infrastructure deficits. However, unlike in neighboring El Salvador and Honduras, which have enacted *Mano Dura*, *Super Mano Dura*, and *Ley Anti-Mara*, each designed to strengthen law enforcement approaches to control gang violence by employing low evidentiary standards to incarcerate gang members, President Berger did not follow suit. The Government of Guatemala has not passed specific legislation to address gangs or organized crime. There are no Guatemalan equivalents of America's anti-racketeering laws, which allow suspects to be charged with conspiracy to commit a

criminal act, rather than the act itself.³⁰ The Guatemalan legal system considers all cases as illegal single acts, where proof of guilt is accepted only when it is individualized.³¹

The Government of Guatemala has endured less criticism from the international human rights community than the Governments of El Salvador and Honduras, primarily because it has not enacted any *Mano Dura*-type legislation. However, the Government has received its share of accusations from human rights organizations of using social cleansing tactics or of turning a blind eye to the use of such tactics by rogue elements in the police force. When the Guatemalan government claims to have “begun a softer war against gangs that focuses on recreation and rehabilitation programs,”³² it has overstated the situation a bit. While the Government did donate a large farm, *Finca Santo Tomas*, to be used for gang rehabilitation programs, there is still a clear imbalance between government investments in prevention/rehabilitation and law enforcement activities. Despite not having enacted specific anti-gang legislation, the Government of Guatemala has nonetheless stepped up efforts to control gang violence in selected neighborhoods with high crime levels. As organized crime, particularly drug-related crime, establishes a firm foothold in the poor urban areas of Guatemala and other countries in the region, the standard government response has been to increase efforts to control the violence through increases in arrests and/or police presence. In Guatemala, this response has been representative of the state response to gangs. The state has stepped up efforts to control violence and dismantle gang networks by increasing law enforcement actions in areas with high crime levels. The short- and long-term effectiveness of this approach is debatable. Crime levels have not abated in Guatemala, despite increased law enforcement efforts. In addition, a legitimate concern of many analysts is that the targeting of low-income communities by state security forces in the fight against drugs highlights the fact that it is the low-level, not the high-level, actors who are vulnerable.³³

Another concern relates to the role of the military in addressing crime in Guatemala. While a stated goal of the Peace Accords was to reduce the role of the military in civilian affairs and establish a new Civilian National Police force, the Government of Guatemala has instituted plans for joint police-military action to patrol crime-ridden civilian areas for up to three years as institutional improvement projects are being implemented. Given the history of state-sponsored, military-led violence in Guatemala and the stated objective of reducing the military’s role in civilian activities, this is a disquieting development. In response to an increase in reports of state-sponsored violence and “social cleansing,” the Government’s Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office has begun to send observers along with police patrols to monitor potential abuses of power.³⁴

Although the government response has overwhelmingly favored stepped-up law enforcement efforts to confront gang violence in targeted communities, the Government

³⁰ “Out of the Underworld,” *The Economist*. January 5, 2006.

³¹ Interview with Raymond M. Campos, U.S. Embassy/Guatemala, Narcotics Affairs Section, October 12, 2005.

³² Thompson, Ginger. New York Times article *Guatemala Bleeds in Vise of Gangs and Vengeance*, January 1, 2006.

³³ Leeds, E. 1996. “Cocaine and Parallel Politics in the Brazilian Urban Periphery: Constraints on Local-Level Democratization.” *Latin American Research Review* 31 (3): 47-85.

³⁴ Christian Science Monitor

of Guatemala is supporting certain strategies, policies, and programs whose implementation could significantly impact the problem of gang violence by tackling key socioeconomic and contextual factors that are fueling the gang phenomenon.

- *National Policy on the Prevention of Youth Violence* – The policy, approved in June 2005, is a product of the Presidential Commission of Human Rights (COPREDEH) with support from the Ministry of Government. The development of the plan appears to be a step in the right direction by focusing its efforts on mitigating key socioeconomic risk factors such as youth unemployment, weak social capital, and poor education. In addition, the policy lays out concrete strategies and interventions to implement the policy. However, sufficient resources have yet to be identified for its implementation.
- *National Civilian Police (PNC) Reform Strategy* – The GoG has taken difficult, but critical, steps to address corruption in the police force. In addition to firing several officers that have engaged in corrupt activities, the three-year police reform strategy seeks to accomplish a number of important tasks. In 2005, the focus will be on upgrading equipment, training, and communications. In 2006, the PNC will emphasize legislative reforms, management evaluations, and field professionalization programs. The objectives of these reforms are to strengthen the police academy to improve the quality of recruits, develop more effective promotion criteria, increase the number of women in the force, and upgrade learning to include more permanent instructors and incorporate distance learning. In addition, the strategy plans to improve prison programs to incorporate more rehabilitation, such as education services. Finally, an evaluation of the program will take place in 2007. While there is currently political will behind the much needed reforms at the highest levels of the GoG and PNC, given the deep-seated nature of corruption, progress in this area will require a sustained commitment over a number of years and additional funding for implementation.
- *Ministry of Education* – The Ministry supports an innovative program that addresses some of the key socioeconomic drivers of youth gang activity – poor education and unemployment – by providing alternative delivery education systems. The program is administered by the *Direccion General de Educacion Extra-Escolar*, or DIGEEX and is working closely with CONAPREPI (*Comision Nacional de Prevencion de la Violencia y Promocion Integral de Valores de Convivencia* – National Commission for the Prevention of Violence and Promotion of Peaceful Coexistence). The philosophy driving many of DIGEEX programs is to bridge theory and practice, school and the “real world,” by providing education that is directly relevant in a particular community context and that is directly linked to employment. For example, training in a community in a textile market would focus on developing textile industry-relevant skills. Classroom lectures emphasize “real world” problem-solving. DIGEEX provides, as the dynamic Director calls it, “formal informal education.” Specific programs include “centros polyfuncionales,” or capacitation centers, that work directly with municipalities to provide technical and vocational training and education to

residents. Currently, there are 425 such centers in Guatemala, including in Villa Nueva and Mixco – two areas with high levels of gang activity. DIGEEX also provides accelerated primary education, working through municipalities and NGOs, and has plans to improve secondary level education in public schools as well.

Civil Society Response

- *Nongovernmental organizations* – while there are some non-governmental organizations implementing activities aimed at preventing at-risk from joining gangs and working towards rehabilitating and reinserting former gang members into society, such efforts are few, scattered, and relatively small scale. Some of the more prominent NGO-led activities are briefly described below.
 - *Ceiba* – a Guatemalan NGO that provides a number of prevention-oriented services to at-risk youth and some former gang members, primarily in Limon - an area in Guatemala City that is home to many gang members and high levels of narco-activity. Programs range from daycare for 2-6 year olds to advanced information technology and training and job placement for teenagers. The *Ceiba* program is demonstrating the value of NGOs that are based and focus their programs within crime-affected communities. *Ceiba* is staffed primarily with community residents who understand the nuances of their community and thus are much more attuned to the specific needs of youth in their community, and have avoided the “cookie-cutter” programmatic approach that often reduces the impact of programs managed outside of affected communities.
 - *Youth Alliance Program (Program Alianza Joven - PAJ)* – the objective of this program, funded by USAID/Guatemala and implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc. is to build multi-sectoral relationships between the public, private, and civil society spheres to prevent crime at the local level. The PAJ model supports NGO alliances, such as the Association for Crime Prevention (APREDE) which has created youth development centers that provide a range of services to at-risk youth and former gang members to prevent their involvement or to return to gangs. Services include vocational/skills training, job placement, computer skills development, English language training, agricultural extension, and accelerated learning. The PAJ model is particularly useful in that it recognizes that youth are in need of multiple services, all of which any single NGO would be unable to fulfill alone, but which alliances of NGOs can successfully address by leveraging resources and skills, thereby maximizing impact. PAJ is also supporting local crime prevention councils, which convene several local stakeholders (local authorities, local businesses, and civil society) to develop local crime prevention strategies, conduct public awareness campaigns, and related activities. PAJ has provided grants to APREDE, the Association for the Monitoring and Support for Public Security (IMASP), and six Crime

Prevention Councils. PAJ is also involved in rehabilitation, by providing rehabilitation services to vulnerable youth and former gang members at *Finca Santo Tomas*, a large farm donated by the Government of Guatemala. Finally, PAJ recently launched a five-episode reality show, called “Challenge 10: Peace for the Ex,” which features ex-gang members working together to develop small businesses.

- *Fundacion REMAR* – the Foundation provides drug rehabilitation and counseling services to youth addicted to drugs. Judges have the option of sending sentenced youth here instead of a juvenile detention center.
- *Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence* – This newly created coalition, less than a year old, was created as a regional counterpart to the Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence.³⁵ The new coalition is comprised of violence prevention champions from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador and recently received a one-year grant from the Pan-American Health Organization for its first year of operation. It is expected that the Coalition will assume such roles as advocating for balanced government approaches to dealing with gangs that include significant prevention and intervention components, and improving information-sharing across countries on best practices in youth violence prevention.
- *Faith-based organizations* – Churches, particularly evangelical churches and less so the Catholic establishment, have a growing influence on the lives of gang members, particularly those interested in leaving the gang. However, their capacity for service provision appears to be limited to the provision of religious services. One champion whose efforts are worth noting is Father Manuolo Makela, a Jesuit priest, who is working in Zone 6 in Guatemala City to provide services for at-risk youth, including education, vocational skills training, and life skills. In addition, a group of Franciscans are providing services for at-risk youth and former gang members in El Mezquitil. Finally, American missionary groups are involved in providing education services, primarily in rural areas.
- *Private sector* – while the Guatemalan private sector appears to recognize the negative impact that crime and gang violence are having on trade and investment in the country, their direct engagement and support for initiatives to address it has been fairly limited to date. The USAID PAJ activity has had some success obtain private sector support, specifically from Microsoft, Grupo Geo, and the Jorge Toruno Foundation.

A lesson that can be drawn from the above NGO-led activities is the importance of supporting community-based activities that are designed and managed with the direct

³⁵ Inter-American Coalition for the Prevention of Violence is comprised of the Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Pan-American Health Organization, Organization of American States, World Bank, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and USAID. The Coalition’s objective is to advocate for and coordinate violence prevention activities in the Americas.

involvement of NGOs in affected areas. The push and pull factors that draw youth into gangs vary by community. Community-based needs assessments are essential to accurately mapping the patterns of crime and violence to determine what types of specific activities are needed to counter these factors in any specific community and draw upon the knowledge (that donors and traditional American implementing partners don't always have) of communities in identifying problems and developing solutions. For example, in Limon, Guatemala where narco-activity is more intense than many other locales, activities should be tailored to specifically counter the pull of youth into narco-activity, both as consumers and drug distributors. The status and income that is conferred on youth working in the narcotics trade is relatively higher than other trades. Alternatives must recognize this. As a *Ceiba* employee stated, "if you offer a kid from Limon a job in a *panaderia* (bread shop), he will laugh in your face. Whatever alternative you provide must be able to compete with the status and self-esteem that a savvy job in the narcotics trade offers." Community residents, other members of civil society, local governments, and youth in particular, should be engaged in assessing community problems, needs, and existing capacity. Community-based assessments should be undertaken in communities where socioeconomic risk factors are prevalent, such as El Mezquital, Escuintla, Villa Nueva, Mixco, and Amatitlan. These assessments, particularly when conducted just prior to a new program being implemented, can also serve as a baseline for measuring the impacts of programs implemented in these communities. This is a key challenge that needs to be addressed – the lack of NGOs willing and/or without the capacity to work in crime-affected neighborhoods.

Donor Response

Donor assistance in support of crime prevention activities in Guatemala is growing steadily, highlighting the importance of communication and coordination among donors.

- *US Government:*
 - *US Department of State and USAID* – the joint US Government Rule of Law Strategy identifies "creating a new vision of policing" as a key objective. The US Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) and USAID are working together to implement a pilot project in Villa Nueva, a satellite city of Guatemala with high levels of gang activity. The activity's objective is to combine law enforcement approaches with community-based policing methods to reduce gang violence. Specific elements of the program include the creation of a specialized "Gang Unit" to use improved criminal investigative methods to identify gang members involved in drugs/arms trafficking, homicides, and extortions and process them through the formal justice system. The program has developed a vetted, trained cadre of investigators and crime scene specialists addressing priority concerns of the community, including gang violence, extortion, and homicides. A confidential hotline has also been set up to provide residents a means of sharing information about criminal activity with the police. Building on this joint USAID-State activity, a new

community-based policing pilot program is being launched that expands ongoing USAID crime prevention and rule of law programs and the NAS law enforcement program. The program will strengthen justice sector capabilities with emphasis on improving prosecutorial capacity; strengthening the institutional capacity of the National Civilian Police; increasing forensic investigation capabilities; and increasing national and local government engagement on crime prevention. Given that the National Civilian Police is a highly centralized institution, efforts to strengthen community-based policing and other interventions that necessitate devolution of authority to the local level will be both challenging and risky.

- *Other USAID/Guatemala Programs* – The USAID Rule of Law program (implemented by Checchi) is working to strengthen the justice sector and, through the creation of and support to Justice Centers, improving coordination between different justice sector actors. This coordination fosters crime prevention efforts by reinforcing peaceful conflict resolution. This includes the mobilization of community members to work together in preventing crime through a comprehensive approach that directly addresses the causes and opportunities for crime in their communities. For example, the Rule of Law program is working in several departments in Guatemala to conduct community-based crime mapping to develop community-driven solutions. These crime prevention efforts are coordinated with other international donor and other related U.S. Government-sponsored programs, including the USAID’s Youth Alliance Project activities. The Rule of Law program has also begun production of a *radionovela* program entitled “*Amor Entre Rejas*”, about a Guatemalan family struggling with crime and gangs, and examining the different approaches to dealing with crime. In addition, the Mission’s anticorruption program (implemented by Casals and Associates) is working with the judiciary to develop a national action plan to increase internal transparency and accountability within the justice sector. Lastly, USAID/Guatemala is also currently working through its local governance program (implemented by DevTech/International City and County Managers Association) to support implementation of the GoG National Youth Violence Prevention Plan at the local level.
- *Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI)* – While CECI is most active in El Salvador on the issue of gangs and at-risk youth, they are working to develop a regional database of information on issues related to at-risk youth. The database will include information about organizations working on at-risk youth themes and specific programs. The database will cover activities in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.
- *Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)* – The IDB recently approved a \$30 million, 2.5-year loan to Guatemala focused on citizen security projects, which

directly address the socioeconomic roots of gang activity including joblessness, insufficient education, and weak social capital. The emphasis will be on working with Ministries that already have resources and policies in place, to implement those policies. Specifically, the IDB will focus on working with COPREDEH to elaborate the new youth violence prevention policy; strengthening the police, especially community-based policing; developing a citizen security “observatory;” job training and youth employment; improving communication and social awareness on crime issues; preventing domestic violence; and supporting community crime prevention projects.

- *United Nations (UN)* – Several UN offices (UNESCO, UNDP, and UNICEF) are joining forces to work with the GoG Ministry of Government to strengthen the police, protect human rights, and work with NGOs to implement youth violence prevention activities. In addition, UNDP is working with *Ceiba* to strengthen police capabilities to analyze the gang phenomenon in Guatemala. In addition, UNDP is supporting a pilot social/laboral insertion program in Antigua, with private sector support. UNICEF is working with APREDE to provide rehabilitation services through *Casa Joven – Edy Gomez*, or the Edy Gomez Youth House, as well as analyzing the potential for an increased use of alternative sentencing for youth.
- *World Bank* – The World Bank has developed a useful tool entitled “A Resource Guide for Municipalities: Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention in Urban Latin America,” which it uses as the foundation of training it conducts for municipalities in the region. The document is based on the “Manual for Community-Based Crime Prevention,” developed by the Government of South Africa, but was adapted to the Latin American urban context. The guide includes specific municipal approaches for addressing crime, best practice principles in crime prevention, and numerous examples of international municipal crime and violence prevention and reduction strategies.

With so many donor assisted activities underway, a key challenge will clearly be coordination of gang/crime-related programs, to avoid duplication and gaps.

Individuals and Organizations Consulted

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