

YOUTH, VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this document is to make evident the situation of young people living at risk in Latin America and to propose policies to face this problem.

The importance of dealing with the problem of youth at risk comes from the high violence rates in the continent which "is equivalent to destroying a large part of the human capital that the educational system creates every day" (LONDOÑO, GAVIRIA, GUERRERO, 2000). It also comes from the fact that the region will have the largest number of young people in its history until 2020, and that the social cohesion of Latin American societies will depend on the capability to integrate young people as a main social actor and not as a marginal one.

First of all, this document describes the situation of young people at risk and it analyzes the institutional conditions for formulating and implementing adequate programs. Later, it concentrates on the different types of interventions.

1. Young People and Risk

Talking about young people in situation of risk is not an easy task. Firstly, because the concept of youth implies assuming a broad approach that on the one hand, it allows us to focus on some given groups but that it also considers that the meaning of juvenile goes way beyond an ethereal definition. Thus, any definition of youth implies acknowledging that the juvenile period is the time of life when the interaction between individual trends, the psycho-social acquisitions, the socially available goals and the strengths and disadvantages of the environment are produced with higher intensity (KRAUSKOPF, 1999). Therefore, without discussing the age limits of youth, which changes depending on the country and without having a discussion on who is young, here we assume that youth basically covers two periods.

The first period is the adolescence, that goes from puberty at around 12 years old and that it indicates the end of childhood, until the age when the person enters the world of the young adult. Adolescence is a period of physical, intellectual, affective and ethic formation and it is also a period of change and break away, characterized by searching for an identity. During the period of adolescence, the main socialization factors are the family, but in a lesser extent than in childhood, and on the other hand, school and above all peers. In fact, as the studies based on meta-analysis have shown, peer influence is predominant for engaging in violent acts or behavior against the law or uncivic attitudes, more than any other influence (BLATIER, 2002).

The second period is young adulthood, characterized by a double search: entering the labor market, both directly or through studies or training, and building their own family. It goes until approximately 25-29 years old (different countries have different age limits), that is to say, the approximate age to have a family. During this second period, although the original family keeps having a supporting role, it is mainly as a protection net allowing young people to have a house, to finance their studies or to support themselves during long periods looking for a job. School has a less important role in terms of education, it is mainly a professional qualification place and it is not as important for socialization. Peers in the training process, the use and the quality of free time and work have a more influencing role. However, the most important things that characterize

the life of a young adult are the perspectives for accessing the labor market and achieving an affective balance with potential partners.

Secondly, any definition of young people at risk should consider the structural presence of risk in modern society. Thus, due to the modernization process and the technological development, young people are currently more exposed to the redefinition of consumption standards which have worsen the differences in having access to opportunities and the living conditions between those groups which are ahead socially and economically and those which are not. Therefore, the benefits of technological development do not favor all young people from all social backgrounds the same way. There is a socio- economic polarization inside the national societies (BECK, 1998). Similarly, current societies face various risks as a consequence of the modernization processes, where "dangers decided and produced socially" exceed security and imply "a differential impact that makes the social gap more acute", due to wealth accumulation "at the higher classes, whereas risks pile up at the lower classes " (BECK, 1998).

This implies considering that, although youth as a whole does not face the risks of modern society, there are groups that are more exposed than others to develop risk behaviors, due to different factors. That is why the differentiation made at the health field regarding the difference between risk behaviors and behaviors involving risks, is essential.

Risk behaviors are those which affect aspects of the psycho-social development or the survival of the young person. These behaviors are influenced by different factors present in society and in the closer environment (family, school, peers and neighborhood). On the other hand, behaviors involving risks are those when young people assume some level of risk (not very different from what adults do), aware of it and as part of their commitment and the construction of a richer and fuller development.

Thus, it is necessary to point out that it is dangerous to assume that youth itself means being in a situation of risk, because the generalization leads to considering risk behaviors as something normal at this age and therefore, to base them on the characterization of this period of life. Also, this does not differentiate those young people who really have a life style with behaviors based on real risk factors for their development and surroundings.

From this point of view, youth at risk refers to young people who face factors that may affect their vital cycle and their psycho-social development, as for example, having anti-social attitudes, violence and delinquency from different situations of risk. In fact, at adolescence and youth specific behaviors that threaten some groups of youngsters are inter-related. When a young person gets into one of these groups, vulnerabilities with different origins are added up, explaining why young people participate in violent and delinquency acts (KRAUSKOPF, 2003).

2. Characterization of Violence in Latin America

High Violence Rates

Latin America is known as one of the most violent regions in the world and the use of violence as a way to solve conflicts has become a daily practice in the region. Thus, from the 80s, violence

and more specially, criminal violence has become a central issue even considered as one of the main handicaps for economic development (FAJNZYLBER; LEDERMAN Y LOAYZA, 2001). Similarly, it is possible to show that violence and criminality affect people daily life through "weakening the notion of belonging to the society and the idea that the State is unable to guarantee the security of citizens" (REGUILLO-CRUZ. R. 2003). Thus, cities are seen as places where violence is a daily experience, having a public perception (a wrong one) that identifies city with violence, making both words into synonyms¹.

It is also known that, as it happens in other regions, almost 80% of regular crimes (except those related with intra-family violence, white-collar or organized crime) are committed by youngsters between 12-25 years old. However, several studies show that young people are also the main victims of violence in the region. When we analyze the figures of young deaths in the region, the so called "external causes" (including traffic accidents, homicides and suicides) are largely predominant in all cases, and in most of them, they are higher than 50% and until three quarters of all causes of death analyzed (OPS, 2000).

Homicides particularly affect mostly countries such as Colombia, Brazil and El Salvador, with percentages around 62.5 %, 42.0 % and 46.1 % respectively, in relation to the group of causes of death in young men, and in rates reaching 211.4 per thousand in the case of Colombia, and 107.2 per thousand in Venezuela, 96.6 per thousand in Brazil and 95.0 per thousand in El Salvador (OPS, 2000). In the case of young women, the most important figures in terms of their magnitude are those related to transmittable diseases in Dominican Republic, Panama and Ecuador, as well as the figures related to pregnancy and delivery in Nicaragua and Colombia, in a context where indicators not always reflect precisely the real consequences of these complex events (OPS,2000).The analysis of the context where these situations of violence for young people take place shows that being a woman, adolescent, living in a socially unfavorable environment and being a mother, are factors which determine the vulnerable situation of young women. Thus, a large portion of the biological reproduction in the region- 60% or more- happens with young people and especially at adolescence. It is during this period that the most important facts in the reproductive life of a person take place, because at this age they start being sexually active and they expose themselves to sexually transmittable diseases, including AIDS. According to surveys of demographics and health (RODRIGUEZ VIGNOLI, 2005), a large majority of adolescents in Latin America do not use condoms and more than 75% of women has been mothers before finishing their youth. Similarly, a significant amount of sexually active adolescents lack access to information, education and sexual and reproductive health services. Therefore, the acute differences regarding reproduction between adolescents in this region and in Western Europe are not in their sexual initiation but in the early age they start their reproduction: not less than 15% of Latin American and Caribbean girls at 18 and 19 years old has been mothers before turning 18 against 5% of European girls. (RODRIGUEZ VIGNOLI, 2005).

¹ **Reguillo-Cruz, R.**, ¿Guerreros o ciudadanos? Violencia(s). Una cartografía de las interacciones urbanas, en Moraña, M. (edit), Espacio Urbano, comunicación y violencia en América Latina, Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, Pittsburg, 2003. (Warriors or citizens? A cartography of urban interactions, in Moraña, M. (publishing house) Urban Space, Communication and Violence in Latin America, International Institute for Latin- American Literature)

Violence in Socialization Institutions

On the other hand, when we analyze their involvement in violent situations, it is possible to identify that family and the State institutions are places – at a large extent- where Latin American boys, girls and adolescents live situations of violence. ([HTTP://WWW.UNICEF.ORG](http://www.unicef.org)). According to UNICEF both domestic violence (by relatives and people known by the victim) and institutional violence (committed by schools, work place and prisons, among others) are the main expressions of the phenomenon in almost every country of the region. There is also the fact that youth related violence is expressed unequally in territorial terms, affecting more severely poor communities living in extremely marginal conditions, mainly in the main cities of the region. Thus, the poverty belts at the different cities show indicators regarding victims and the origin of those committing violence, and these areas of extreme poverty warn of the situations that have been present in these processes for decades in almost every country of the region (RODRIGUEZ, 2005).

On the one hand, domestic violence affects- directly and indirectly- adolescents and youngsters in many different ways. Young girls and boys witness the violence generated between the adults they live with, on a regular basis (especially within their parents relationships), and on the other hand, they are directly affected by the violence they suffered from adults, both physical and psychological violence. A very significant aspect of this situation is sexual violence. Although there are not compared measurements with equal standards (similar samples and types of questions, for example), the studies available indicate that “on average 22% of women and 15% of men report having experienced some episode of sexual violence before turning 17 years old” in the region. (RODRIGUEZ, 2005). These studies show that the prevalence is similar in different human groups, without significant differences regarding ethnic groups, educational level, socio-economic level, religion, etc...

On the other hand, violence is also expressed at institutional places, such as schools. There are some studies showing that in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Uruguay, violence also reflects on the school, which also suffers the effects of legitimacy loss in institutions. At school, symbolic violence is given through lack of discipline, verbal aggressions and the precarious dialogues between students and teachers, among others. Similarly, the institutional practices that tend to reproduce inequalities, strengthening discriminations and exclusion mechanisms that harm society have an important role. Therefore, they are practices of institutional violence and symbolic violence that are also present in the school and that are characterized, for example, by the way the curriculum and the school are organized.

Thus, the theoretical and empiric evidence show that the criminal environment in marginal sectors goes beyond the school limits and the violence of the surroundings is replicated in the educational environment. Also, very often, the deficient conditions of public education do not make possible to stop the problems of adolescents and youngsters at risk. Thus, school violence shows the internal environment and the crisis of its socialization role. In addition, we must consider that although education is seen as the main instrument of a society to promote wellbeing and to integrate adolescents and young people, in this region education shows great differences in quality and significant relevance among social classes. Thus, the options for social mobility largely depend on the quality of the education received and if it is poor for those youngsters in an unfavorable social position, it can be stated that for an important segment of young people there

is a vulnerability factor syndrome that weakens their ability to adapt themselves to the demands of the contemporaneous world (LUNECKE-EISSMANN, 2005).

Also, in the region not only the quality of education is a factor for inequality, but in many countries still nowadays there are problems in terms of coverage – mainly for secondary and further education- (Technical professional and University studies). Therefore, in many cases the problem is not only a question of a quantitative offer but also a demand that faces restrictions: especially for those young people who frequently drop-out of school. It is calculated that 30% of children in Latin America do not finish their primary education when they turn 14 years old and at that age, many of them have to work. (RODRIGUEZ VIGNOLI, 2005). In the long run this means that future income will be less for these young people who drop out of school, which at the same time, it may suggest to choose other ways (such as crime) to have faster and safer incomes. Therefore, school drop-out seems one of the consequences of inequality structures present at Latin American societies, as well as a possible risk factor.

Together with this type of school violence, young people participate in violence relationships that take place in the school space and that are determined by the logic and codes present in the environment. Violent games, bullying associated with groups are the expressions of school violence.

Other institutional places where young people live situations of violence are custody institutions and prisons. Although there are several studies that have shown evidence on these institutions, there is not much documentation on prisons. (CISALVA 2005a). In addition, there has been an increased number of accusations against police, due to evident processes of abuse of authority, with episodes varying from abuse of adolescents and youngsters who are found in the street “in suspicious attitudes” (gathered in street corners, listening to music or drinking alcohol, with typical “signs” such as earrings and tattoos, etc.) to the murder of those who resist to police requirements or simply cannot prove their innocence (changing the legal principle that every one is innocent until proven guilty) (RODRIGUEZ, 2005).

Violence Generating Environments

In addition, it is important to say that violence is also expressed very strongly at the community, especially in those affected by acute poverty and marginality. Thus, poor communities have to face several situations of severe violence every day. Violence is used to “solve” any conflict produced in precarious contexts where the peaceful resolution of conflicts does not belong to the most deep rooted customs. This is worse when young groups are involved with the style of gangs that with different names (*maras, gangues, etc* in Spanish) appear very frequently in the different cities of the region. Generally, gangs go from the association of youngsters who gather to share their free time in collective activities, not necessarily homogenous or criminal activities to the Central American *maras* whose main activity seems to be related to the organized crime. Different from what it is believed, gangs are not necessarily related to drug dealing. Drug dealing can be an element that encourages violence in gangs, but most of them are not involved with drug dealing. We have to state that for many youngsters, the idea of gangs is not seen negatively but it is a normal and collective expression to search for their identity as young people. (VANDERSCHUEREN, 2004).

Experts on this topic agree that there are not specific factors that determine the creation of these groups, however there are some conditions which influence its likelihood (GILLER, HAGGEL; RUTTER, 2000), as for example, the partial or total failure of family, school or neighborhood socialization. The more or less violent character translates the level of social and urban marginalization of the environment. "Socio-economic privation conditions around young people who enter gangs are better reflected on the environmental conditions of the community where they live. The social and economic exclusion suffered by these young people is not only expressed in the difficulties of their own families to give them an education of quality and to create labor opportunities for their future, but it is also expressed more evidently in the conditions of social neglect of the communities and neighborhoods where the youngsters of gangs live (...) *maras* thrive in districts and places where poverty is expressed in nonexistent social services or when they do exist, their quality is very bad. They are marginal and neglected communities at the vulnerable limits of the city and that are outside the benefits produced by the urban economic development" (CRUZ, 2005). Therefore, when young people face a system that denies their opportunities and their access to resources, they can build up their own "anti-system" reference groups as a way to obtain those things. When there are some given risk factors, gangs substitute families, schools and even the labor market which appears to them as dysfunctional. Although it is true that many young groups can be generated from the same condition, gangs have a more hierarchical organization characterized by a confrontation activity, to get economic resources and the domain of a given territory, with some shares of power within the neighborhood where they are situated. In general, juvenile gangs are partially linked to drug consumption and small-scale drug dealing and they are normally financed through illegal activities, such as theft and robbery. The gang phenomenon has special relevance, mainly in Central American countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, but they are also present in all countries with different features.

It is also within the community – where it is possible to identify juvenile violence related to drug consumption and dealing, especially in poor neighborhoods excluded from development. It is in these cases where drug and violence represent problems associated and related to violence as part of the culture, validation of illegal acts and stigmatization. The main expression of this phenomenon is the presence of a local drug dealing activity, some times describes as "disorganized crime" (LUNECKE; EISSMANN, 2005). In the Latin American context some studies based on the Brazilian reality relate juvenile violence to the high death rates among youngsters – both as victims and as victimizers – and to the increase of drug dealing networks associated with an increased consumption of drugs. In addition, studies on the Colombian reality show that violence is more directly linked to the drug dealing problem. These studies show that in Colombia, since 1985 and within the context of foreign debt, social policies produced a deficit of services and coverage to most part of the population. It is in this context that social movements – and not political ones- appear, with social claim actions largely associated with violence and crime (drug dealing) (ABAD, 2003). Therefore, we have to state that social problems related to drug and violence are not generated by poverty. The deeper causes of this phenomenon must be explained from the idea of multi-dimensional and multi-causes processes. That is to say, social problems start from the coincidence in a given context that is depressed due to social exclusion processes which have affected large sectors of population, mainly young people, where one can see violent facts related to drug consumption and drug dealing. In these cases, drug dealing (closely linked to youngsters who use drugs) offers survival and sometimes, relative enrichment alternatives for those youngsters who have few chances of entering labor market in a satisfactory manner. Due to social exclusion processes their life conditions lack the effective capability to

react in front of the events of the surroundings. It is in this reality that violence and drug appear very strongly. The first one, as a product of social exclusion and other individual and collective processes, and assuming a strong link with committing crimes. On the other hand, drug appears independently from social exclusion processes, and it is mainly associated with its consumption and illegal trade, not necessarily, at the beginning with an organized network for this activity. The way these expressions relate, reproduces the duality violence-drug, and it generates its transmission through street socialization, mainly through the group of peers, easy victims of local drug dealers who put them in charge of controlling their own business in the neighborhoods by paying these young people regularly and giving them arms. They take advantage of the fact that many of "these youngsters who control the corners of the vicinity, do not study or work and therefore they spend their time together in the street, talking, fighting, drinking alcohol or taking some drugs, and some times getting involved in small criminal activities" (SARAVI, 2004). The main expressions of this duality are first given by the action of local drug dealing business, where the highest expression of the culture of the illegal and the practice of violence is found. Similarly, they are an important reference of the characteristics that start stigmatization. In addition, the high levels of drug consumption reflect the high existing supply and the normality that prevails in its trade and consumption in the public space, both illegal activities. Finally, violence as "conflict solving mechanism" shows that violence articulates the different alternatives to overcome situations of poverty and social exclusion, as well as those of daily relationships. Thus, they are seen as daily practices that enjoy the legitimacy of the environment. (LUNECKE; EISSMAN, 2005).

Together with everything above, it is also possible to see violence at the working environment (as for example related to the worse ways of child labor (as slavery and child sexual abuse). ILO has been working intensively against these practices. There is also the problem of large amount of children and adolescents being recruited for armed conflicts (as "child soldiers" in countries such as Colombia). This should also be contextualized in a region where young unemployment is very high and where even those young people who are employed have to face lower working and salary conditions than adults. (BID, 2003). Therefore, for most young people labor market and their inclusion in the labor market, both as unemployed and working at precarious or badly paid jobs, are a sever source of vulnerability in social and criminal terms. Studies by the Inter-American Development Bank show that in some countries of the region, unemployment rates among young people triple those of the adults. This trend currently reaches very high levels in absolute terms, limiting the economic opportunities of this group, and possibly having significant consequences in terms of discrimination, violence and juvenile delinquency (BID, 2003).

Sub-Regional Differences

This summarized and general overview of the main issues related to juvenile violence in the region, is framed on sub-regional contexts that, characterized by common social and political processes, (even with national differences), allow us to deeper understand the inter-relation between violence and youth in the region. Thus, it is clarifying the typology prepared by Ernesto Rodríguez to describe the phenomenon in the region. According to this analyst, "it is possible to distinguish at least three sets of specific situations that despite having some common features, are clearly different in their central points and are characterized by realities of the several sub-regions of the continent, in generic terms." (RODRÍGUEZ, 2005).

First of all, it is possible to identify the reality of Southern Cone countries, where violence and delinquency would be associated with the consequences of *deindustrialization* processes of the last decades of the XX century which produced an increased process of exclusion of large groups of the population. In this context, young people, specially those from popular urban and rural classes, in countries like Uruguay, Argentina and Chile suffer a high risk of social exclusion, derived from some determinations that, from the market, the State and the society, tend to concentrate poverty and to encourage the following isolation of young people in relation to the mainstream social system, that is to say, people and institutions that adjust their functioning to the modal standards of society. This isolation, together with the deterioration of the basic institutions of socialization, favors the exposure and susceptibility of the group of peers of the immediate social environment.

On the other hand, the Central American region presents, although with significant national features, a determinant incidence of war and peace processes in the events more specifically related to youth associated violence (VELA, 2001). In these cases, violence related to young people is closely linked to post-conflict perverse episodes. In some countries, this situation produced that many arms that were in the hands of guerrilla and subversive groups went to private users and to regular delinquency. (ENCUESTA ACTIVA) (ACTIVE SURVEY) 1998). With the demobilization of regular and irregular armies in each national context in particular, there are large groups of youngsters who know how to use lethal weapons, and since they are not able to enter the educational system and the labor market (due to the limitations of the development model and the absence of social security), these youngsters start entering other mechanisms to enable the generation of their own income, associated with several ways of crime and violence. One of the most frequent types is the creation of juvenile gangs (*maras*), which offer contention spaces and mutual support to their members, within the context of severe social exclusion in Central American countries like El Salvador and Guatemala. Thus, for example in El Salvador and Nicaragua, they tend to associate gangs with high levels of injuries and murders.² Similarly, in Guatemala, the appearance of organized criminal groups over the last 10 years, is considered to be associated with the distribution activity, in the local market, of the drug that stays in the country and the relation of these groups with the arms market, after the post-conflict situation (CHINCHILLA , RICO 2002).

Finally, there is a third group of situations which are in progress at the moment in the largest countries of the region (Brazil, Mexico and specially Colombia). This group of situations are based on the development of parallel powers to those legally established, in the context of deep rooted conflicts with large ethnic and racial components, with different events in each particular context, that does not allow us, to a large extent, to talk about common features applicable to the different specific situations, but that share some similar features. (RODRIGUEZ, 2005).

In the Colombian case, the presence of children and adolescents in the Colombian armed conflict is a main concern. United Nations Report states that there are approximately 11.000 and 14.000 children and adolescents in a situation which clearly abuses human rights. (GONZÁLEZ URIBE 2002). The report observes that the members of the different illegal armed groups have killed and injured boys, girls and adolescents and had committed rapes and other sexual crimes against them.

² Rodgers, Dennis. "Youth Gangs and Violence in Latin América and the Caribbean: a literature survey". Documento de Trabajo N° 4 (Work Document No 4). Serie Programa Paz Urbana. Banco Mundial, 1999 (Series: Program Urban Peace. World Bank,1999).

In Brazil, the participation of children, adolescents and young people in urban violence is a main concern. A study done by UNESCO shows that homicides of young people between 15 and 24 years old had a dramatic 88.6 % increase in the last ten years, from 10.173 in 1993 to 19.188 in 2002. Among the murdered youngsters 93 % were males and the homicide rate of black and mixed-raced boys was 74 % (WAISELFITSZ 2005). The increase of homicide violence is exclusively explained by the increase of murders of young people (rates went from 30 to 54.5 cases per 100.000 residents in this case, whereas for the general population, the increase was from 21.3 to 21.7 cases per 100.000 residents).

On the other hand, Mexico shows high levels of violence with an increasingly closer relation among individual and organized delinquency; drug related problems and drug dealing and the development of consolidated illicit markets such as arms trafficking, drug dealing, smuggling of goods and animals, car theft, kidnapping and money laundering (CHINCHILLA; RICO, 2002).

Therefore, a deeper analysis of the context where juvenile violence takes place shows that differentiated situations are basically the ones that make possible to characterize the respective processes, overcoming the commonplaces that originally established some over simplified links between poverty and violence. As it can be seen, exclusion (more than poverty) is a required condition, but it is not enough to explain the existence of severe violence examples. We have to add processes related to irregular power groups interacting with the legally established public power and complex scenarios of economic and social development with the existence or inexistence of social integration opportunities, together with critical situations in terms of controlling basic resources, such as land, productive processes, etc. (RODRIGUEZ, 2005).

3. The Importance of the Urban Approach

Violence and juvenile victimization are above all urban issues, given the level of urbanization of the region (> 70%) and the fact that a large part of the regional social exclusion has been dislocated to the cities and is reflected on them.

It is known that delinquency rates are clearly higher in the cities than in rural areas, and not because urban areas create criminal surroundings or because of the size of urban agglomerations, but due to the poor urban management that has characterized many cities. In fact, it is the absence of the city as an integration and social cohesion element, the "no city" that generates favorable conditions for delinquency. In effect, a worldwide or regional comparison between the size of the cities and delinquency rates shows that the dimension of the agglomerations is not a factor for explaining delinquency.³

The urban approach that focuses and considers the territory of youth problems related to the behaviors within the social context of the city, makes possible to deal with the situation of

³ Tokyo is the largest urban agglomeration in the world (28 million inhabitants) is one of the safest cities in the world, whereas Port Moresby (<300.000 inhabitants) is the most criminalized city in the world, according to UN, Bogota that has three times more inhabitants than Cali, is a much less criminalized city than the latter. Some cities in Northern Chile have higher robbery rates than Santiago which has 10 to 20 times its size.

youngsters at risk in an integral manner and it makes possible to relate this approach to the policies aimed at young people.

The urban approach that considers territory when dealing with the problem of youngsters at risk incorporates the three above mentioned urban paradigms of the region. The first one corresponds to the problem of the Southern Cone deindustrialization cities, where groups of young people risk social exclusion in deteriorated, marginalized or stigmatized neighborhoods. The second one is characterized by the situation of large countries with violent contrasts between dominant sectors in constant tension with dwellers of urban areas of poverty without the support from the State, which is too weak and ineffective to protect them. Finally, the third one is the situation of Central American countries characterized by the consequences of post-civil war, together with the impact of migration to the United States and the introduction of a type of industrialization based on *maquillas* (textile factories for export).

In the three cases, the introduction of drug dealing, the increased unemployment and the gender and inter-generation conflicts have differentiated effects on the cities and its neighborhoods and on the young people living there.

The aspect of territory of the different modes of urban violence related to youth shows the type of risk and the groups in situation of vulnerability. For example, it allows us to understand the situation of young people living in *favelas* or slums in Rio, involved in territories controlled by drug dealers for whom violence had become natural. It also explains the situation of young women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, where the phenomenon of *maquillas*, hiring women for low salaries, the gender conflicts and the types of neighborhoods lead to a context of hard and daily violence. It helps understand what some observers (KESSLER, 2004) call the "amateur crime" of young people in Southern Cone cities who come from broken sectors due to the deindustrialization of the last decades, and whose families used to be more integrated into the labor market. They have lost the values that accompanied work and they substitute them for consumption, which is now the source of legitimacy. In effect, for these young people work, robbery or any other activity tend to be only legitimated means to satisfy their consumption needs.

The urban approach makes possible to decipher the city and to discern the contexts in which the different youth groups are. On the one hand, it is the city of rich sectors for which risk is associated with illegal drugs consumption or not, with the danger of car accidents, with the influence of a discriminating environment or possible corruption which introduces values and attitudes far from the solidarity required by a project that wants an inclusive city. On the other hand, it is the city of young people in areas of extreme poverty, who have to fight every day for survival and very often family and school only offer limited help. Young people from impoverished sectors or from areas without any structure, where the risk for men is the amateur crime or the progressive involvement with illegal activities, especially drug dealing. For women, the risk of early pregnancy that limits their possibilities for personal development or sexual abuse that very often covers human trafficking activities.

Above all, the urban approach makes possible to reach the neighborhoods and to understand their meaning for residents and for young people. It makes easier to understand all types of internal conflicts, such as gender conflicts, inter-generational conflicts, conflicts for social integration, for entering the labor market, for having access to consumption or to services, for status, for values, for real territorial control (drug dealing, local leadership, police, access to

services) or for symbolic control (gangs, graffiti). "The neighborhood is a black box whose exploration can enlighten new aspects associated with social vulnerability processes" (RODRIGUEZ, 2005). Only the understanding of the social relationships and the internal dynamic of the neighborhoods makes possible to explain why different neighborhoods with the same socio-economic level produce a predominance of illegality, whereas in others there are collective and individual efforts towards social mobility and integration.

The urban perspective also facilitates the incorporation of the different approaches which characterize the programs made for youngsters at risk in the region. In effect, the public policies have been traditionally dominated by a risk approach that had often led to "adult-centered" policies (risk is perceived as danger for the adult world), more than questioning youngsters' own development through their behaviors.

On the other hand, this approach has generated answers that insist on incorporating an approach that locates social exclusion processes as causes of violence in economic, social and culturally damaged and deteriorated contexts that would affect adolescents and young people. Each one of these dimensions can only be perceived within the urban context and in the relation to the neighborhoods where young people socialize. Therefore, the neighborhood can compensate for the socializing deficiencies of inclusion that family and school have. However, the neighborhood can also be an exclusion factor, depending on the way it is organized. This organization is given by how social relations in the neighborhood take place on the one hand, and on the other hand by its physical, social features and its geographic localization. The examples of approaches of the "*chavos bandas*" groups in the State of Leon in Mexico, that tries to destigmatize these youngsters who are a symbol of this lack of order for traditional sectors and also the "open school" program in Brazil, which relates school and neighborhood community in urban areas of social exclusion, show it is only possible to deal with these situations in their exclusion context that means an analysis of the concrete urban reality. In both cases, the approach facilitated a working strategy that looks for the respect and promotion of new youth identities like the creation of urban spaces where these identities can be expressed, generating links and integrating themselves into the urban space.

Another complementary approach to the risk, has been built on the need for developing the social capital of youth based on their rights and more specifically on their right to take part in the decision making process on issues related to them. This view insists on the following items: understanding young people concerns, especially if they feel excluded; their right to use the public space as other community members; the participation of young people guaranteeing that programs and interventions meet their interests; the commitment capability of young people and their perception about the way services work.

The idea of social capital goes back to social relations bearing in mind that social organizations evolve and are flexible and sensitive to the environment conditions, and of course to create, encourage or increase social capital (ARRIAGADA, MIRANDA, 2003). Social capital refers to social networks, to relationships of trust and to institutions that create a given social tissue. They also refer to the way individuals and/or communities enter and participate in such structures and how this type of insertion results in obtaining opportunities for individual or collective action.

In this context, the concept of social capital refers to the advantages and opportunities people have; the benefits based on the ability to create and support voluntary associations and

cooperation networks. In their relationships, people use values and standards, moral and cultural rules are result of the formation of their personalities in given contexts and it is precisely in these relations where the capital is located. Similarly, the resources obtained through ties are values, knowledge and abilities that contribute to community insertion, to the strengthening of solidarity and social integration. The social capital approach forces to consider the life cycle of young people emphasizing on youth integration processes, like for example education and citizenship. Therefore, young people are focused on their social and individual capacities and capabilities and in relation to other social subjects, either peers or adults in their urban context. Thus, there is an integration of the individual dimension that includes several aspects of personal development (risk management, self-efficacy perception, pro-social behavior, empowerment, management of ties and social support, creativity) and the collective dimension that includes social supports with which young men and women have to achieve their life projects through local and/or community institutionality, social and communities ties, family environment, public services etc.

With the incorporation of the social capital view, the urban approach gives youth a central priority, from the advocacy and development of their rights and their participation. This should strengthen local communities.

Finally, the urban approach makes possible identify, consolidate and encourage local actors who should intervene in a process of security co-production through policy practices that involve public and private services, civil society and communities.

4. Navigation Chart

4.1. Work Framework for Public Policies at a Local Level

Tackling youth violence in Latin America from an urban approach means on the one hand, assuming an approach of co-production of security and on the other hand, the decentralization of policies from acknowledging the role that community and local government have in preventing violence and delinquency of adolescents and youngsters.

Co-production of Security

Co-production in terms of citizen security refers to the process that allows all central and local State agencies like civil society and private sector institutions, and the residents involved to participate in building a safer city, in a responsible manner. It also allows them to face effectively and in a coordinated way the problems of lack of security like gangs, school violence, stigmatized or vulnerable neighborhoods, young people at risk, etc. Co-production is based on the fact that everyone is responsible for safety and not only the criminal justice system. This premise comes from the multi-causal nature of crime and from the anti-social behavior, as well as from the need for a coordinated and integrated multi-sectorial solution.

Co-production can be institutionalized or can be agreed upon around a local leadership. It can also be spontaneous like in those countries where civil society and the decentralization experience are deep rooted traditions like in Brazil.

The main consequence of assuming co-production as intervention framework, is that it is necessary to adopt integral approaches that require breaking with the division in the implementation of prevention practices. Co-production implies that the State agents that intervene are prepared to do a team work. This means a specific training that teaches how to break with the limited attitude on the only affirmation of institutional identities. Thus, the coordination of activities means that the people involved in this task had been familiarized and trained in joint work. In this case, the defense of the identity of each institution is subordinated to the central goal, which is the concerted prevention work. This implies a polyvalence of the agents and their ability to work closely with the authorities and local organisms.

On the other hand, co-production requires that all institutions involved consider themselves as co-responsible, not only of the solutions to the problems but also as constitutive elements of the problems. This implies to be opened to organizational modifications and above all, to changes in the mindset inside the institutions in order to face the problems.

Local Government Role and Decentralization of Security Policies

The security building practice in the cities requires an emphasis on the community. "The community is at the center of every efficient action to prevent crime. The people living, working and playing in the collectivity are the ones who understand better the resources, the problems, the specific needs and the abilities of their region... The communities should be ready to invest time and experience, and local leaders should contribute to mobilize a complete range of local partners to face criminality and victimization problems. The success of projects to prevent crime through social development is based on the active participation of all partners in their conception, execution and assessment" (MARCUS, 2004).

Similarly, intervention and management of citizen security policies by local authorities are based on the *principle of proximity*. The idea of proximity refers not only to be physically close within a territory, but also to social accessibility of a service in human scale. This means a better knowledge of the reality, the most effective management possibility and daily monitoring and the possibility of local connection with social policies. In effect, local authorities can relate prevention to a political project of a legitimate local government. An elected community board can articulate its safety policy with the several social policies it promotes. It can also coordinate itself with local police forces and inspect them legitimately or it can even create a municipal police. The proximity principle also acknowledges the capability to mediate local conflicts and to provide answers to the changing demand of security formulated by the residents. This demand corresponds to the search for quick and visible answers to small and medium scale delinquency or vandalism and the degradation of public spaces that favor fear.

Since the Conference of Local Authorities in Barcelona in 1987, this reality has been acknowledged in different regions and the successful practices of cities of the region, such as Bogota, Diadema, Rosario and Monterrey have confirmed the validity of this approach. This action of local authorities regarding citizen security has two main goals. The first one is to reach an agreement and implement a local strategy for prevention with the local community and the police. The second one, which is a long run goal, is to build a prevention culture, that is to say, that the community acquires a reflex so that whenever they have to face an increase or a change in criminality, they look for the causes and the collective answers, instead of acting out of fear or

delegating the exclusive responsibility to the police. This goal indicates a citizen attitude that goes from fear to accountability.

4.2. Design and Implementation of Local Integral Strategies: Main Elements

Effective Local Leadership

Political leadership means that local authorities have ownership of citizen security policies regardless who initiates this policy. Leadership implies much more than an administrative management capability. It requires the ability to design a strategic view defining the main guidelines and generating trust around them (PAULSEN, 2005). Local authorities, specially the Mayor, have a democratic mandate that makes possible for them to unify social and urban policy with security policy within a project for the city or district. This synthesis is characterized by taking care that the democratic rights of each citizen are respected, the necessary inclusion of a security policy into urban planning, the capacity to organize partnerships among sectors that are not used to work together mainly in security matters, and finally, the search for security as a common good. Local authorities are responsible for acknowledging the specific competences of the partnership members, the agreement process and its inclusive aspect.

The decisive role of local authorities does not mean to substitute the role of the Central Government. As several experiences show (as in the case of the Program Safety Community in Chile), the role of the central State keeps being essential as co-financer through the contracts as evaluator and monitor and finally promoting the exchange of practices and information. On the other hand, there are intervention contexts where the role of the State is preponderant, like for example, in the complementary police interventions to any preventing action, especially regarding drug dealing, in the case of justice and in the coordination of social policies and urban planning.

This leadership is also an ethic leadership, because it is obvious that it would be a contradiction fighting against delinquency and allowing corruption and money misappropriation practices. Leadership implies favoring the quality of life adequate for the context of each community or neighborhood.

Creation of a Technical Team

The demand for a competent technical team that supports local authority to make this strategy more dynamic and to coordinate their actions is evident. This technical team is mainly needed in most cities in the world that adopt a citizen security policy.

These new responsible actors for security who act under the municipality authority, develop cross cutting policies for the different departments and municipal functions, but their profile is not very clear, making their task difficult. In fact, the first drafts for the creation of this team are seen in Latin America. In addition, this team faces the normal danger of becoming project administrators and not strategy guides. Very quickly they are swamped with administrative work and they do not have time to monitor local actions.

Local Diagnosis and Strategy Design

The work method includes two important steps: the need for a diagnosis of local insecurity, its causes and the impact of the current responses and the formulation of a local strategy of agreed security. The diagnosis is a necessary stage for the success of any municipal strategy. It makes possible getting to know the delinquency expressions and its main places and also to identify the risk factors and to discern the possible guide for intervention. It is an instrument both for unifying and mobilizing the community actors and to initiate some debates and theme work groups that disseminate and analyze the expressions of crime and anti-social behavior and their causes. The diagnosis helps to reach a consensus on the expressions and causes of delinquency and on priorities and the ways to be followed. It also reaches consensus on assessing current interventions and the answers given to delinquency by the criminal justice system and by civil society. The diagnosis is particularly important in the case of young people because in most cases, the expressions and the local causes of the so called anti-social behaviors are ignored. Whereas the results of the practices that indicate rehabilitation (drug addicts for example) or (re)insertion of youngsters in conflict with the law, those who left school or violent gang members, are unknown. Also the perceptions, often wrong, that the adult population has of young people and the level of inter-generational conflict that can be one of the causes of juvenile violence in the neighborhoods, are also unknown. On the other hand, prevention is mainly focused on the youth, because they are most victims and victimizers, and also by definition, they are the population group in the (re) education stage.

The strategy defines the goals and the priorities and it is expressed in an agreed action plan. Its formulation is based on the diagnosis results.

The action plan details interventions, its specific goals, the expected results, the action schedule and the responsible partners for each intervention and the institutions involved. For each intervention, a responsible entity is indicated and it assumes the leadership of the intervention. The monitoring of each intervention normally corresponds to the partnership that supports it, assisted by the technical team of the municipality.

Assessments will depend on the clarity of the indicators and on the expected results of each intervention. The implementation of the strategy is based on partnerships that develop an action plan and a central partnership. Normally a Municipal Board on Security monitors and guides the process. The different practices are evaluated on a regular basis, according to the indicators built in each city.

The strategies had taken each city to develop very different types of plans. The practices cover a set of interventions with variable geometry. In the case of youngsters, for example there are practices related to including young people at risk (gang members, drug addicts, those who left school) with young victims of intra-family violence, with authors and victims of school violence, with the reinsertion and (re) education of youngsters having problems with the law, with the learning of mediation, with education through monitored recreational activities, with entertainment programs for young delinquents, with the development of community service as an alternative sentence, etc...There are not limits to the practices, unless those imposed by law or by the lack of agreement of the residents.

Participation and Partnerships⁴

⁴ In Spanish there is not a word that translates the exact concept of “partnership”. The term “coalición” is used as equivalent.

The participation of residents should be the basis of all community and social development programs in the neighborhoods, declared the First World Conference of Mayors on Security in 1987 in Barcelona. In effect, the basic assumption of the participative approach resides in the importance of the community in the preventive action. However, the implementation of community participation requires an understanding of the features of its intervention in the preparation and implementation of a local strategy for security.

In fact, the participative approach can be understood as a reference to the community as holder of a set of cultural values that would automatically impose any way of social control on the group of residents. This view is opposite to the heterogeneity of values, behaviors, inter-generational conflicts and attitudes that avoid an effective social control. Nowadays, being a "good thief" or an efficient small drug dealer is valued in some communities. In fact, social control requires more than just a reference to common values, it needs to shape the common property that is being organized and that it is able to impose some rules. In effect, the presence of a "perverse social capital" in some cases leads to collective behaviors that cause a considerable damage to the community. This is particularly clear in the case of the communities affected by drug dealing.

The participation of the community needs to involve partnerships of organizations and institutions with complementary experiences and that can intervene efficiently in preventing one or several types of delinquency. Currently, this is one of the most important lessons from successful experiences regarding citizen security.

Partnerships are created around common goals and start with the initial diagnosis and the formulation of a strategy with specific action plans. They are consolidated with the implementation of focused projects. According to the goal, partnerships can be permanent as for example those created by the Municipal Boards on Security. They can also be sporadic and specific depending on a problem that needs to be faced, like for example school violence or drug abuse. Generally, partnerships gather organizations of the public sector involved in prevention activities with the police, justice, social services or specialized services, such as those in charge of preventing drug addiction with community organizations and civil society.

Partnerships can be located at an inter-district, municipal or even at neighborhood level. The essential aspect is the commitment of dynamic sectors, with specific competences that complement each other. Partnerships are the condition and the starting point of community participation.

One of the main difficulties found in several cities is that young people do not participate, when it is a known fact that their commitment is a fundamental condition for having success. The main reason for this lack of participation is the adult centered nature of many programs that places the young person as receiver of the programs and not as the active subject of their development. There is not an analysis of the contributions that young people may give for solving their problems and for society as a whole.⁵ Changing this attitude for empathy towards youth means understanding the perceptions that young people have of their own situation, very often exclusion

⁵ The movement of secondary students in May – June this year in Chile, (called the penguin movement that took 800.000 students in a cross cutting citizen movement) showed the capacity young people have to give a strong contribution for proposals and organization to society as a whole, awakening it from its lethargy.

and generational conflict. Problem perceptions differ according to the different age and gender groups. In several cases, exclusion of young people in the neighborhoods deteriorates the creation of links and networks within the communities, unless those developed in perverse institutions. (MOSER Y MCILWAIN; 2000).

4.3. Design and Implementation of Focused Local Strategies

The analysis of the region in terms of juvenile violence and delinquency shows that in order to tackle the phenomenon, first we have to consider that young people are victims and victimizers of violence and that together with the significant armed violence that shows youngsters involved in violent gangs, places like the family and State institutions also show very clearly, worrying levels of violent situations where young people are involved. Also, it seems evident that the surrounding conditions are determinant for violence, therefore it is urgent to act on these surroundings. Similarly, the work done with youngsters at risk should mainly consider the integral answers and should be strongly based on the so called "social capital", combining four types of approach: the community perspective, the network perspective, the institutional approach (co-production); the approach of rights and the risk approach in order to explain the phenomena.

Thus, basic society institutions are essential for designing alternative strategies. A specific example is school, a place where many successful experiences are taking places all over the region. Another key institutional space for the development of strategies for young people is the municipality. Latin American experience gives an account of many programs developed by municipalities in the region that are currently showing different lessons.

On the other hand, the analysis of several national experiences of policies for youth (as it is the case of Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, etc) shows that avoiding social isolation of young people is essential, incorporating them into broader situations, specially regarding their participation and the exercise of their rights from the citizenship perspective. Therefore, it is not enough to work with the "empowerment" of young people if it is not done from an integral view thought in terms of building citizenship. From this point of view, the dynamic and effective commitment of young people in broader initiatives is more relevant. Initiatives such as participative budget, social control of public policies, community organization, etc... together with the structuring of programs that accompany the "life cycle" of people in all relevant public policies, avoiding the "gaps" and "inconsistencies" currently existing, for example, current programs of school meals at elementary education which are completely eliminated at secondary education.

Thus, at the moment it is possible to witness a broad and complex set of challenges that forces to work intensively on the strengthening and modernization of the management of the main institutions involved, more specifically police, justice and childhood and adolescence protection institutions. This is done through a working model of local partnership that considers the main local agents and whose main protagonists are the youngsters themselves. Similarly, the success of every local strategy should be directed at focusing on the main problems regarding juvenile violence in the region, limiting itself to given groups of young people in situation of risk.

Youth Gangs and Possession of Arms

"A juvenile gang is a voluntary association of peers, together for common interests, leadership and internal organization that acts collectively in order to achieve some goals even illegal activities and the control of the territory, equipment or business" (MILLER W.B.,1992).

Gangs in the region have different expressions, they vary from the simple association of youngsters who share their free time in very flexible collective activities and not necessarily homogeneous or criminal ones to the Central American *maras* whose main activities are criminal and violent acts. There are also the *barras bravas* (*sport hooligans*) which claim the control of the territory through sport symbols and act violently against other gangs or against those who do not share their preferences.

The studies by (CONCHA-EASTMAN AND SANTA CRUZ, 2001; CERBINO, 2002) on any type of gangs, have shown that the main factors to explain them is found within the family, school and the community environment. Violent gangs tend to develop themselves among socially marginalized youngsters, for whom school and family do not work. The peers assume the function of an affective community that serves as a reference for the gang members. In the specific case of Central America, the influence of migration⁶ (MOSER AND MC ILLWAINE, 2004) in a post-conflict context and the impact of ways to control gangs, explain their degree of violence (RODGERS, 2003).

The groups of youngsters, constituted into structured bands or gangs of minors are perceived by adults as associations that amplify the delinquency risk. On the one hand they have a multiplying effect on the range of anti-social behaviors of young people. Furthermore, their impact on the perception- well-founded or subjective- of urban insecurity also changes the social environment, turning this environment into a "stigmatized" or "vulnerable" neighborhood.

On the contrary, adolescents do not perceive gangs negatively but as a normal expression on their search for an identity. In effect, the organization of young people in more or less structured or flexible groups corresponds to a stage in the adolescents' growth and these organizations are not necessarily violent. The members of a gang share the same activities of many other young people, such as going to school, work on some occasional jobs, go out and they only dedicate some of their time to the gang. "The serious social problem is not the *sole* fact of belonging to a gang, but *the way of being a gang*, the values implied in being an active member and above all, the unhealthy attitudes, habits and actions of their members" (SANTA CRUZ and CONCHA-EASTMAN, 2001).

The important thing when facing the problem of violent gangs is, first of all the capability to diagnose the "violence route" (SANTA CRUZ and CONCHA EASTMAN, 2001). That is to say, to identify the means through which the initial impact of family conflicts starts being within the school or school drop –out context or free time or search for income, physical aggressions to other people and in some cases, more serious crimes like homicides, robberies, rapes and injuries. The essential thing is to understand which factors facilitate going from one stage to the next one.

⁶ The deportation from USA of Central American migrants' children who belonged to gangs in Los Angeles and transferred their practices to El Salvador or Honduras

Secondly, an adequate intervention means understanding the political, institutional and judicial framework in which gangs can evolve and change. In other words, the public policies of a country or city can facilitate or stop the development of gangs and the conditions that allow them to start and develop. Post-conflict policies in some Central American countries show this.

Thirdly, facing this problem means understanding the socio-economic context where it takes place. Unless in the cases of total inclusion into the hard delinquency world that generally implies the presence of adult leadership, the gangs co-exist in an ambiguous but peaceful way with the environment of their families and of public or private services working in these areas with the presence of gangs. Very often, the features of the gangs reflect their environment. The more violent and excluded the environment, the more violent and in more conflict with the values of the society the gangs are. Therefore, an intervention that does not include the environment – as goal and actor- decreases the chances for success. “Conditions of socio-economic deprivation around young people entering gangs are better reflected on the environmental conditions of the communities where they live. Social and economic exclusion suffered by young people is not only expressed in the difficulties of their own families to give them a quality education and to create labor opportunities for their future, but it is more clearly expressed in the social neglect conditions of the communities or neighborhoods where the gang members live.”. (CRUZ, 2005).

The ways of interventions directed at gangs should take into account the levels of development of the gangs and gang members. Schematically, four levels of intervention can be identified:

Firstly, the action directed at the gang periphery. There are non systematized examples of these interventions, mainly between community police in Ecuador and Colombia, with the intervention model of the Canadian police which concentrates its community interventions on these youngsters in coordination with local organizations. This is primary prevention.

The second type of interventions (secondary prevention) is directed at those gangs with some members who commits acts against the law (such as small scale drug dealing, small thefts) or use drugs or sporadically work as “barras bravas”. In these cases, two types of interventions had been verified: one directed at separating the leaders from the rest. The neutralization of the leaders is a strategy that makes possible to work the reinsertion of other members. In some cases, this is done through supervisors, who act as intermediaries in an intervention program, and gang members.

A variant of this type of intervention is not trying to end the gang but to change it into a positive social activity. This model has been successfully applied in the city of Monterrey since the year 2000, working with many gangs to change them into pro-social working groups, dedicated to garbage recycling, entertaining activities during parties or community activities. This last case requires the commitment of local authorities, resources, specialized supervisors and community participation supporting this process.

The Monterrey model aims to: educate and integrate into the labor market , when possible, the gang as a whole. It has several stages:

1st stage: registry of gangs with public and private entities and starting a dialogue with each one of them.

2nd stage: diagnosis of the neighborhoods they come from.

3rd stage: approach of a program from the interest areas of the group (one year).

4th stage: work plan from a concerted program with public and private entities involved.

5th stage: execution of programs with cultural activities and assistance to communities with exchanging activities with gang members.

Finally an evaluation is carried out.

The lessons learnt with this model are that the main condition for success is the simultaneous work with their own families and that results are very positive with most gangs, unless with the hard core too much involved in criminal delinquency.

On the other hand, there is a type of intervention to limit the damage related to conflicts among gangs which generate more injuries and deaths. It takes place through mediations done by the police or by other community members. This model has been applied in some Colombian cities.⁷

When other types of gangs require primary or secondary prevention, the intervention with *maras* belongs to the tertiary prevention and it should be approached in an integral way. It requires a close coordination with police, justice and rehabilitation services. At the same time, it is necessary to carry out a work with local communities since *maras* appear where there is lack of community social capital (GABORIT, 2005). This work should be directed at the empowerment of these communities. A necessary condition for the community to be a transformation entity that, together with the help from the State and civil society, can counter the influence of *maras* in the environment.

It also implies an institutional framework that regulates the possession of arms and the capability to negotiate with the U.S.A. the deportation conditions of migrants' sons in conflict with the law.

Youngsters at Risk and Legal Frameworks

The analysis of the different existing legal frameworks to deal with young people at risk shows that in general, in Latin America there are not any specific rule related to violence prevention and the existing ones focused on intra-family violence and sexual abuse. Therefore, current laws do not include the treatment of cases associated with gangs or problems of violence and abuse suffered by youngsters with State institutions, as for example police violence. This shows that although most countries of the region has signed international treaties that recognize the inalienable rights of boys, girls and adolescents, the current laws do not guarantee the existence of these institutional and legal mechanisms that facilitate the full enjoyment and exercise of the Rights in specific issues. Thus, central and local governments should advocate for passing and having specific laws on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, education, HIV, sexual violence, employment, etc., connecting them to general rules on health, education, work, etc.. that make possible to effective exercise the rights that guarantee that boys, girls and adolescents excluded from different opportunities can achieve their life projects. These legal frameworks should be binding on budget definitions directed at fulfilling economic, social and cultural rights included in the human rights treaties and in the legal constitutions of each country. (RODRÍGUEZ, MORLACHETTI AND ALESSANDRO 2005). They should also be binding on criminal laws that deal with young people in conflict with the law, often unrelated or even

⁷ Conflicts for "territory control" are the ones that have produced more deadly accidents.

contradictory. An example of this is the current legislation on “*maras*” and juvenile gangs in Honduras. On the one hand, at the end of 2001, the “Law for the Prevention, Rehabilitation and Social Reinsertion of People Belonging to Maras or Gangs” was passed. This law has an integral approach that would make possible to direct the work at these areas from a respectful view on Human Rights. However, at the beginning of 2002, there was a reform of the Criminal Code (article 332, known as the “anti-*maras* law”) with a complete opposite approach. The Law was passed at the end of a constitutional government, and the reform was processed at the beginning of the following government. In fact, the current government is applying the Criminal Code reform which makes possible to arrest, judge and imprison youngsters who are members of *maras* or gangs, just for the fact of being gang members, regardless the commitment of a crime clearly described in the current legislation. On the other hand, the Law has not been applied and only this year a Program for Prevention, Rehabilitation and Social Reinsertion of People connected with *Maras* has been structured. This program has very few resources and it does not have an effective political support. (RODRIGUEZ, 2005).

A paradigmatic experience regarding legislation dealing with young people at risk and in conflict with the law from an approach on rights is the experience developed in Costa Rica since 2003. Costa Rica, where a National Assembly of the Young Person was created, passed a National Policy whose legal substrate had been promulgated in 2001 and that gave broad representation rights to young people. At the same time, in this context some specific actions were established in two areas. In the first one (dissemination), there are two large areas of action: (i) “dissemination and promotion of civil and political rights at national, regional and local scope; and (ii) information, education and dissemination related to the rights of young people to their private life, having as target public the youngsters themselves, their families and employees of governmental, private and mixed organisms”. In the second one, (fulfillment, restoration of rights and demandability mechanism), there are four specific areas: (i) “articulation of inter-institutional actions for reviewing and implementing effective measures that guarantee personal safety of young people; (ii) establishing inter-sectorial mechanisms for fulfilling civil rights and their restoration to those young people who had their rights taken away or denied; (iii) creation and strengthening of demandability mechanisms of civil and political rights in young people population; and (iv) exercise the right to freedom of speech and to the real participation of young people in decision making on relevant topics for youth” (RODRIGUEZ, 2005)

Youngsters in Conflict with the Law

The analysis of the institutional and governmental answer regarding youngsters at risk and in conflict with the law has generally been influenced by specific events or situations and not by State strategies or policies that tried to give an effective and sustained solution to the phenomenon. Throughout the years, these specific measures have generally been control and repression policies, directed at strengthening laws and favoring freedom privation measures on strategies of prevention and social reinsertion. The permanent criminalization of young people, has justified all speeches on law and order, the constant harassment and police persecution. However, it is very important to indicate that although there had been many juridical discussions on young people in conflict with the law, the absence of the practice has been remarkable.

Problems of coordination and communication among the different institutions, scarce and insufficient resources, any formation whatsoever on the topic and many times, the lack of political will, are the reasons why despite the fact that in many countries there is a new institutionality

watching over them, young people do not indicate any improvement in their social or economic situation.

All this has taken the institutions of childhood protection to face a double challenge: to assume with even more decisiveness and consequence the attention offered to adolescents and on the other hand, to assume that traditional approaches focused on executing the complete cycle of these legal programs only in the hands of the justice system, do not have basis or feasibility any longer. Therefore, they have to open up to the agreement of efforts with a wide range of governmental and non governmental players, working in a more decentralized manner.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is a first work model related to the above. It tries to diminish individual and family risk factors showed by young people. These strategies have identified the level of risk of the offender determining the intervention degree and intensity and it guides the work to the incidence factors on the anti-social behavior; they have also developed participative and active methodologies at work with the prevalence of multi-modal work approaches, directed towards the influence on several different types of problems and to strengthen the individual social skills (GILLER, HAGGEL; RUTTER; 2000). Rehabilitation tries to stop youngsters from committing crimes again. The experience indicates that the earlier the intervention, better results. The programs carry out treatments of multiple individual, social and economic risk factors that have an incidence on the young offender. They indicate the development of different abilities of youngsters through training and educational methods. They use methodologies focused on the practice and based on trust and ties among those in charge of the treatment and the young offender.

Two important supporting elements are psychological therapies that work on those factors that affect the violent behavior directly through active and participative methodologies. Such as parents' participation in young offenders treatment (PATTERSON, 1992) participating in family therapies. However, the psycho-social features of high social risk families do not allow the parents to participate in the rehabilitating process.

Among the models on the rehabilitating view, there are the institutional treatment approaches, based on the extensive use of individual tutorials and training of inter-personal capabilities. Several programs of Community Residence Centers are centers for guidance and orientation, education and vocational training. However, their success depends on the presence of an adult supervising a small group of youngsters.

Models for Alternative Justice

The traditional punishing approach aims to increase the costs of the criminal act. However, there are not empirical evidence that proves the effectiveness of punishment/sentence measures and the direct relation with dissuasion produced by these measures to stop young offenders from repeating the offense (FARRINGTON; 1997). Moreover, the lack of flexibility of these measures does not make possible to treat the phenomenon in its complexity. Therefore, different justice alternative methods for adolescents had been implemented in order to avoid their early contact with the justice system that produces negative effects.

The successful Community Model for Alternative Justice combines the offender supervision with his/her participation on a recreational and work program. It also offers support with problems at home, rehabilitation and punishments. The main efficacy is related to the work done with the parents, with social re-adaptation programs after the treatment and with the focus on specific risk factors showed by the adolescent.

The most promising programs are inspired in the Restorative Justice model that makes possible the meeting of the offender and the victim and the direct amend. These approaches are mainly based on the general idea that being more aware of the personal and social impacts of their crimes can be useful for young offenders.

Young People in Conflict with the Law and Use of Drugs

Regarding youth delinquency and drug use, the experience shows achievements and successful results reached with new models directed at dealing with the problem. Among them, one model that shows some pilot experiences in the region (Brazil and Chile) is Drug Courts. They are specialized courts on dealing with trials of law offenders addicted to alcohol and/or drugs. The young person is submitted to a treatment and reinsertion process as an alternative to the prison, since it is considered that in these cases, imprisonment measures are not effective tools for rehabilitation, because they do not manage to attack the root of the problem, that is to say, the addiction.

Drug Courts combine the vigilance process of court systems with therapeutic capacities of anti-drug treatments. With this association of services, the offender or participant undergoes an intense regime of anti-drug treatment and supervision, and at the same time, he/she must attend regularly scheduled hearings with a judge. The program is supervised by a team of expert professionals on treatments of topics related to criminal justice, who review each participant case before attending the regular hearing.

In general, Drug Courts demand that the participant does not commit any crime or use alcohol or drugs. Also, participants are forced to look for additional educational and training opportunities. Most Drug Courts programs require that the participant stays within the court jurisdiction for at least one year. Besides, an intensive anti-drug treatment and the management of each case, the participant who has been accepted into the program also receives a benefit from the criminal justice system. Some possibilities are receiving a less severe punishment, charges withdrawn or finishing the supervised freedom period earlier.

There are several different ways in which jurisdictions deal with the legal elements of the participant case. Some times the existing charges against the program participant are kept until the end of the program; and once the program is successfully completed, those charges are withdrawn. If a participant does not finish the program, the process continues as normal.

Other jurisdictions require that participants declare themselves guilty before entering the program. If they finish it successfully, their statement is withdrawn and the charges are reduced or withdrawn. If they do not finish the program, there is generally the alternative option of going to jail for a much longer period than that the court had originally offered them, in case they had not accepted the treatment option offered by the court. Another possibility is that participating in the Drug Courts programs is a requirement for supervised freedom or on parole.

Drug Courts deal with charges going from drug possession until property damages. Since many drug addicts steal to finance their addiction, Drug Courts also deal with these charges of property damages caused by substance abuse. If a Drug Courts program participant has committed a crime involving a victim, as in the case of a robbery, generally the program demands the return of goods.⁸

Youngsters, Drug Dealing and Vulnerable Neighborhoods

Every strategy directed at reducing vulnerability of youngsters in stigmatized neighborhoods involve the need to consider long term strategies, that should start with an adequate diagnosis of the reality and that makes possible to understand the penetration process of drug dealing and its relation with the community and with young people. Studies in Chile on vulnerable communities allow us to appreciate that there is a very close relation between drug, lack of trust, fear and arm possession. Drug dealing networks are present in social relations that support the community, whereas the internal empathy, that in the past used to give some degree of stability are destroyed, limiting the community responses that used to face the typical structural problems of a vulnerable populations. (UNIVERSIDAD ALBERTO HURTADO, 2004). These studies make possible to indicate that drug dealing does not take place in any poor neighborhood but in those where the following conditions are seen: deterioration of human and urban tissue, strategic places (next to an important street, easy access and preservation of customers' anonymity) for selling drugs to well- off segments of the society.

Thus, the search for answers should involve a deep analysis of the inter-relations between delinquency and drug dealing networks with the social and cultural plot of the context where it takes place. This means understanding drug dealing and what it takes as a way of violence that many times, co-exists both with an installed culture of aggressions in daily relationships and with the increasing drug use in society, with more visible consequences in these communities than in others.

Therefore, the work strategy should be an integral one in order to involve economic, social and cultural solutions. It is in the local environment where the answers should be prepared and the authorities have to be the leaders. The proximity they have with the community and its main problems, allows them to approach them better. Obviously, this does not mean to stop establishing the necessary coordination with national and regional intervention agencies to deal with the phenomenon from a more global point of view. Similarly, directing the work at groups or at specific problems makes possible to set priorities and to use resources adequately.

In addition, it is necessary the involvement of several local and community players, such as institutional, social and political stakeholders in the process of analysis of the reality and in the building of answers. Police intervention alone is not enough.

Therefore, the main problem is the necessary "physical but also cultural disarmament of violence" and not the exclusive and priority focus on drug dealing. That is to say, that together with the essential police intervention in these cases, coordinated with other social preventing interventions, there is a need for a collective analysis of the values and behaviors leading to

⁸ The implementation of this model in U.S.A. showed a rate of repeated offences of 16% when compared with the rate of 43% of untreated offenders

violence and that generate a "culturally" fertile land for drug dealing and its later influence. It is important to tackle the issues of intra-family violence, school violence, thefts, alcoholism, small local mafias present everywhere, leading clientelisms but also institutional violence towards these communities and their permanent discrimination.

Some programs of this type had been implemented in Latin America and had been mainly directed at reducing socio-economic factors affecting youth participation in drug dealing. One of the most remarkable experiences in the work area, is the one in El Salvador, within the context of several private initiatives (not always well articulated) that include efforts done by non governmental organisms, Dom Bosco Industrial Estate, for example and the active support from some international organisms such as UNDP and UNICEF, working in coordination with State organisms such as Public Security National Board, Governance Secretary, Youth National Secretary, El Salvador Institute for Childhood and Adolescence , etc...)

In the case of Dom Bosco Industrial Estate programs and projects, it is remarkable how they combine professional training with personal and social education within integral promotional processes, mainly directed at youngsters in extreme vulnerability situation, including adolescents in conflict with the law. The impacts achieved have been very significant, with very low rates of repeated offenses among the participant youngsters. The available systematizations show that among other options offered by the Dom Bosco Industrial Estate, *"Miguel Lagone and Laura Vicuña are a real alternative option and almost the only one in the country to re-insert youngsters in conflict with the law into El Salvador society, combining work, study and professional training, together with psychological and clinical assistance, and creating real conditions for a psychological and corporal balance of these young people and for them to be able to incorporate themselves to the country productive life"* (GTZ 2004).

The "keys" to success seem to be, among others, the following ones: (i) work training should be focused on professions and skills with direct and immediate practical usefulness in their daily life; (ii) together with labor training, these programs have to offer social formation in values and capabilities for life; (iii) they should work intensively in following up labor insertion processes of youngsters, knowing that it is a round journey full of obstacles to be faced and overcome; (iv) training should be accompanied by a real labor practice, that generates income for young people; (v) strong empathies between "non teaching" instructors and youngsters have to be encouraged, where the instructors can be "references" in many areas at the same time and not mere transmitters of knowledge and skills; and (vi) they should encourage "young to young" activities as much as possible, supporting the development of leaderships, training young multipliers, backing group processes more than the individual ones (see for example UNICEF 2004a).

School Violence

The analysis of experiences that have been promising on school violence prevention in the region shows that positive results are achieved as long as: young people and their communities "own" the educational facilities (they feel them as theirs) instead of attacking them, they defend them; schools become "friendly", synergies encouraging the comeback of "deserters" are produced; "education for life" tools are offered (not only they pass on somebody else "knowledge" with a doubtful practical use in exclusion contexts) and greater "empathies" between the involved actors in the educational process take place.

Together with the above, the experience indicates that a first necessary step to diminish violence inside educational institutions is to re-value their socializing role and as a priority agent for inclusion of youngsters at risk. " Due to its capacity to regulate interactions among peers, the school gives the best context for preventing delinquency at adolescence" (CUSSON, 2002). Thus, the models of efficient school have proven to be successful. These models are mainly characterized by the cohesion and empathy of a team of educators kept by a strong and motivating leadership. This team has "the necessary competence and dynamism to solve problems as they appear, in order to identify, analyze and find adequate solutions and mobilize the energies needed. In addition, the inclusion of the creation of mechanisms of peaceful resolution of conflicts through innovative methods, such as mediation, educates showing that there is another way of solving conflicts, other than violence.

Therefore, every local strategy directed at reducing school violence, should identify and focus their efforts on schools affected by expressions of violence. As it has already been said, this type of violence constitutes just another expression of the inequity affecting some urban areas and the families living there. Among the causes of school violence, we have to distinguish those coming from psycho-social characteristics of the students, those coming from the school organization and those which are consequences of the social environment. In order to deal with the phenomenon and its causes, this type of strategy should consider at least three approaches: the first one considers above all, the school internal organization, the second focuses on the students' risk factors, whereas the third one shows the action on the environment and therefore on methods of co-production of security. Nowadays, most promising interventions combine all these approaches.

Emphasis on the school

This intervention model is directed at improving the internal organization of the school through the design and implementation of shared rules, applied homogeneously and prepared with all the school community. Discipline and a clear set of rules known and shared seem to be the determining element, which constitutes protection against school internal violence. The need for the legitimization of the rules often forces to go through a creation stage in common to be done inside the school with parents and students. In order to do this, it is also necessary to train teachers to face violence, since it is not enough having competent teachers on their own teaching subject but they also should receive training on how to react to recurrent or serious violence related problems. Another action line at educational institutions is the situational prevention in schools, since many of their physical-spatial conditions contribute to episodes of violence. The physical structure of the schools, their construction characteristics, the number of students per class, the way the shifts work and its surveillance, the size of the school, the number of students per classroom, students' protection when they leave the school, the control of the surrounding area, the accessibility to infrastructures for protecting students', teachers' and staff objects and lockers, the balance on the composition of students per class are factors that influence the peace environment and therefore they are supporting factors for teaching in schools. However, the main factor stills is the number of students per class.

Emphasis on Students at Risk

A second line of work is the one that focuses on students at risk, through a follow up and the analysis of social and psychological conditions. It is possible to identify programs for education of parents, with at home intervention, the training of parents for managing situations, the development of skills in children and programs for early intellectual enrichment. There are also programs that focus on these students, but with group interventions offering a solid academic program. The use of adequate educational methods with a strategic management of the classes with supporting assistant staff can give good results.

Emphasis on Co-Production with the Environment

Finally, and as it has been said above, programs should be directed towards the school surroundings. These approaches emphasize several aspects:

- The perception of the school as part of the community and the invitation to residents to participate in school activities.
- Creation of relations with the private sector and local professionals.
- The importance of the internal environment of the school, without limiting this aspect to physical security.
- Adopting a partnership model aimed at solving the problems.
- Adopting multi-sectorial strategies assuming that an intervention is more effective if it deals with all risk factors. (Shaw, M. 2001).

“Alternative” schools are a follow up measure in the case of “vulnerable” or stigmatized neighborhoods. Besides the special classes within the schools, there are alternative schools or formation centers that for the students at risk and their families, mean places to have access to multi-services, making the school into a coordinating element of all local partnerships created. Similarly, regarding arm control inside schools, there are intervention strategies of security co-production, instead of only a police intervention. These strategies involve the community, and also the local police, and it can change behaviors in the neighborhood. Arm possession is not a school problem, it is mainly a problem of the environment and it should be treated as such.

5. Intervention Agents

The development of an urban approach that guides strategies for preventing violence and juvenile delinquency through a focused work that takes into account the territory, involves the intervention of different institutions that operate at different levels. Different local, national, international and civil society agents are called into this task. On the other hand, the experience on the region shows that there are already multiple experiences showing different outcomes with lessons to be learnt. One of them is the overlap of efforts done by different players. Thus, it is necessary to define roles and functions of the multiple players and agents intervening in this field.

International Cooperation Agencies

The huge efforts carried out on prevention by international financing and political institutions have produced undeniable success, Bogota for example. But nowadays a greater effort is needed because funds are insufficient, the lack of coherence and lack of coordination is very frequent and the lack of evaluation is evident.

Particularly insufficient is the support to decentralization on this area, the clarification of the impacts of the approaches adopted as for example that of citizen safety is vague and the exchanges between cities in the region are scarce. Whereas other regions⁹ favor the exchange, Latin America seems to stop this aspect often substituting the exchange of experiences for the debate between "experts".

The lack of continuous technical support to the technical teams is real and the training of local experts is deficient. The creation of a critical mass of local leaders at a municipal level does not have enough funds and most cities do not have the necessary resources.

Direct cooperation among international organisms and cities should be favored without having to go through the central government filter in all cases.

On the other hand, real efforts for a community police would deserve bolder initiatives, but instead they are being left to the good will of governmental authorities and police forces. The answer to the demand to increase the police contingent is more accepted.

In summary, despite an undeniable awareness of the problems and its dissemination, and despite important successful experiences, the current stage requires a greater effort in several aspects.

Knowledge management on this issue has to take place at specialized centers and universities. Nowadays, a few institutions like these have the means to carry out this task and to disseminate its results. The role of international organizations is also that of supporting these institutions and its disseminating capacity. The time of the first pioneers has passed, it is time to reinforce a long reach university reflection. As an example we remind that the successful reform process towards a community police in Canada started from the collaboration between police and university centers.

Among the issues that deserve a more substantial support, the cooperation between public and private sectors on prevention is one. On the other hand, the dissemination of significant studies that counter the superficial opinion of the media, worried about the sensationalistic impact. The reflection and the evidence of practices that make possible dealing with the issue of the territory of delinquency, especially that linked to drug dealing and its implementation in urban territories would be very relevant today.

In its role of provider of financial and technical resources, international organizations that have been pioneers in the security issue in the region should keep supporting the governmental initiative but at the same time, they could reinforce a decentralized and more diversified support.

Role of Central Government: Legal and Institutional Support of Local Strategies

In order to deal with youth and violence, the main role of the central government is guaranteeing an institutional, legal and economic support that ensures the full development of local strategies on prevention directed towards youngsters at risk. Central Government has to define policies that make possible articulate all particular efforts, generating their essential *synergies*. Therefore, it is evident that government organisms specialized on youth and violence (Ministries, Institutes, Prison Programs and Youth Boards) have to and must fulfill a much more active and accurate role in terms of articulation of efforts, encouraging consensus processes and contributing with those tools that facilitate and promote works developed in the prevention system as violence control.

⁹ Europe favors exchange between cities through the European Forum for Citizen Security. Africa has frequent exchanges activities due to the Mayors' Association and the United Nations support.

It is also the role of central agents to strengthen and modernize the management of the main institutions involved in prevention and control, among them police, justice and institution of childhood and adolescence protection. Regarding police, its modernization should be directed at changing the existing institutional culture that in many cases has a prevalence of repressive, violent and stigmatizing concepts towards the most vulnerable groups of youngsters. As it has been showed, young people are victims of high levels of police violence in different countries of the region. Regarding justice, the main challenge has to do with its abilities to guarantee the fulfillment of human rights and the established laws. Also another central challenge for the legal system is to articulate all non freedom privation measures directed at young people, in an efficient manner. Therefore, this system must dialogue and be open to multiple players, such as NGOs, foundations and municipalities in order to be able to offer better answers than those given until today with traditional criminal measures and sanctions.

On the other hand, childhood protection institutions should assume their attention to adolescents with a better management and planning through a more decentralized functioning. In this area, dialogue and communication with local agents is a central issue.

Local Governments: Coordination, Implementation and Assessment.

Municipalities should carry out similar functions in their respective operative working spaces, encouraging concrete articulations on the implementation of specific actions, in their respective territorial environments. Thus, it is necessary that these governmental units strengthen their planning, implementation and assessment capabilities of articulated actions, overcoming their classical functions of execution of infrastructure works and, in some cases, of implementation of social programs of national reach without an agreement, such as health, education, etc.

Therefore, it is essential to have clear and dynamic mechanisms at the local level, for civil society participation at all stages of development of public policies, such as design, implementation, monitoring, control and assessment. In order to do this, municipalities should open their doors resolutely and social organizations should be more and better accountable for the occupation of places of participation that are being created, such as participative budget, social control of public policies, participative assessment of plans and programs, etc.). It is also the role of local government to design and implement follow up and assessment strategies of each program implemented.

Civil Society Organizations

It is urgent that youth movements and organizations, both formal and informal, at a national and local level have an equal participation with all the other civil society institutions and organizations. Therefore, it is essential to eliminate the existing discriminatory practices in several specific contexts, some times focused on simple mechanisms legally established that demand formal requirements that do not coincide with the dominating youth culture, as for example having a legal entity as a condition to take part in respective processes. Some other times these practices are based on "adultist" criteria that do not recognize an effective capability in the new generations to take part in the decision making process.

The existence of better youth organizations and movements more willing to actively participate in these events is also a condition, including a specially remarkable effort for occupying these

spaces that are being opened in terms of citizen participation, such as participative budget, social control of public policies, community development, etc..., conceived as key tools for preventing violence related to adolescents and youngsters at the level of primary interventions described in the scheme included in previous pages.

5.3. Development Strategy for the Region: Pioneer Cities and Experiences on Violence Prevention

As it has been mentioned above, the increasing concern about security, both public and citizen security, has reached Latin America, showing a wide range of national and local experiences. In most of them, the problem of young people appears as a central one since they are the main protagonists of violence, both as victims and/or victimizers. However, in most cases the models and strategies implemented are the classical criminal approach, attacking more the consequences than the deeper causes of violence, with strong repressive aspects. Also they have focused on specific problems with a lack of more integral and wider approaches. Thus, when dealing with youth and violence, there are still simplistic approaches limiting themselves to solution of repressive character or even to the mechanic association between poverty and delinquency, postulating the fight against poverty as an almost "magic" answer to solve violence (RODRIGUEZ, 2005).

In addition, in many cases it is possible to see the lack of accurate information on the main problems affecting significant sectors of youth population and it is possible to say that even when there are not systemic assessments of the experiences, it is neither possible to show relevant results from the different experiences (LUNECKE and VANDERSCHUEREN, 2004). Despite the above, the analysis of different experiences shows some paradigmatic cases that have implemented more integral solutions pointing towards chances for success in the future. In all cases, these are programs that try to attack the causes of the problem. They have been effectively implemented for less than five years and although their impacts have not yet been assessed, they show an interesting approach.

Certainly, these cases of cities and programs are references for developing and strengthening local strategies for preventing juvenile violence in the region.

Bogota: Integral Strategy at City Level

Colombia's Citizen Safety and Community Insertion Program tries to support a set of interventions directed at encouraging the community insertion of citizens and prevent and control urban violence. The interventions that have been taking place for over one decade are articulated with the public health strategy having an impact on the so-called risk factors. The most relevant risk factors identified are impunity, little credibility of justice and police, relations that favor the violent resolution of conflicts, the inadequate handling of violent facts by the media, the presence of outlaw juvenile gangs and armed groups, the proliferation of arms in the civil population and the uncontrolled use of alcohol and other drugs. The activities done at a national level are directed at offering the necessary tools for the knowledge and assessment of the multiple types of violence affecting Colombian society, and to reach a consensus on the generating factors on which some work could be done. In addition, the national program includes a technical assistance fund to support municipalities and it is being applied mainly in Bogota, Cali and Medellin. Information systems, review of the current legislation, alternative systems for rehabilitating minor

delinquents, civil population disarmament policies, and others are being financed with this fund. Similarly, activities such as investigations and promotional programs linked to encouraging community insertion, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, fight against social exclusion and others are also financed. The most paradigmatic case is the experience of the **city of Bogota**, where the Program also has a great priority associated with young people, working from a mainly preventive perspective with two lines clearly identified: prevention and communication (strengthening of communication processes for inter-personal, group, school, collective and mass relationships) and prevention and production (creation, strengthening, organization and training for executing educational projects for work and productivity). From this standpoint, there is a promotion of processes for building identity and self-esteem, support for achieving their own legal income, creation of work habits, development of capabilities and skills, etc.

Violence Prevention within the School Context

A first experience which deserves to be highlighted is the "open schools" Program in Brazil, a strategy for preventing juvenile violence with the participation of more than 1.500 schools, involving 500.000 adolescents and youngsters in the States of Bahia, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, San Paulo and Mato Grosso. The strategy was to open elementary and secondary schools on weekends and holidays to carry out recreational and sport activities with adolescents and young people of the surrounding communities. Most students who attend these schools regularly come from these communities, as well as many deserters of the educational system who do not find in the education the elements that can answer their social integration expectations, such as preparing them for the labor market, for exercising their citizen rights, etc.. The criteria used to include the schools into this experience were very simple: a low offer of entertainment in the surrounding community (the neediest areas of the urban centers) and high violence rates in the schools and in the community. The accumulative experience shows that violence rates dropped, and at the same time there is a significant number of "deserters" who come back to the regular educational system of the schools included in the program.

Other experiences regarding this topic are those which have focused more specifically on school violence, with those who stay and interact daily in the educational facilities. Compared studies show the seriousness of these problems and the relevance of some of the solutions implemented. It seems that the promising solutions are being developed in Brazil (Peace at Schools Program, running since the year 2000), in Colombia (Educational Policy for School Training in Community Insertion, established in 2001) and in Peru (Peace Culture, Human Rights and Violence Prevention Program, set up in 2002).

Costa Rica: New Legal Framework for Juvenile Criminal Responsibility

The Costa Rican experience is an interesting one because it is different from the current practices adopted in the whole region during the last decades and it tries to work based on a model supported at the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (applicable to everyone under 18 years old, considering them as subject of rights and not only as people in an irregular situation that have to be protected). It follows the path opened in 1990 with the approval of Brazil Statute on Children and Adolescents.

The main principle of this experience is the diversity of legal treatment applied to adolescents and youngsters. In this case, children are not only criminally unimputable but they are also criminally

irresponsible. In the case of children who commit a criminal act, they can only receive protection measures. On the contrary, adolescents, also criminally unimputable are however criminally responsible. That is to say, they respond criminally, with the same terms of specific laws, to those conducts that can possibly be characterized as crimes, offenses or contraventions.

In addition, this legal instrument specifies sentences according to the dimension of the committed "crimes". Autonomous facilities for reclusion of adolescents, specially those who commit a crime for the first time, the emphasis on recovery and not just the punishment with which these institutions work, and alternative measures to reclusion, autonomous or separated from adult prisons, as for example the several types of "supervised freedom" applied with the support of specialized public and private institutions.

Experience of Nuevo León- Mexico- Inclusion of Youngsters at Risk

The projects carried out by the City of León have focused on juvenile gangs who pose a central concern for the municipal government, since they were accused by authorities and public opinion as being responsible for violent gang activities in the streets and for different criminal acts.

The initiatives towards these young people combine assistance aspects with participative elements whose main goal was rescuing youngsters with disorientation problems, those belonging to gangs and also drug addicts, using the natural leadership of their environment, in order to promote their formation, development and social re-integration favoring a healthy community insertion and the commitment with their community. Thus, the work is done with youngsters coming from conflict sectors (gang members) who are rehabilitated with the purpose of "rescuing" other youngsters. Additionally, The Board for Youth Promotion has the mission of coordinating and articulating institutional efforts that offer a greater strength to those programs directed at young people. Therefore, the municipality has opened itself to new sectors of youngsters, having a preventive work with children and adolescents from the same neighborhoods where the gang initially was, in order to stop them from falling in the same situation of those youngsters.

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