



Co-constructing Human Security in Mexico: Methodology and action plan from the communities towards the state

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Editorial Design and Print

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OCTO DESIGN

Between 2016 and 2018, an international research team from Mexico, Colombia and the United Kingdom worked with residents of neighbourhoods severely affected by violence, crime and insecurity. Women, men, youths and the elderly¹ together with a diverse team of researchers analysed the insecurity issues that affect neighbourhoods in Acapulco, Apatzingán, Guadalupe and Tijuana. Based on a dialogue between locals and academics, we identified the most detrimental issues to human security in the neighbourhoods.

Human security starts with the recognition of the threats, risks, vulnerabilities, anxieties and fears that affect personal and community well-being and rights, as well as the capacity to exercise and defend such rights. Human security also revealed the relationship between different problems that cause uncertainties on a daily basis, reproduce violence, and facilitate the recruitment of young people by criminal groups.

In Apatzingán, Guadalupe and Tijuana, we created **Local Human Security Agendas** together with the communities as part of a process that we call co-construction. These agendas not only include a diagnosis of the issues that affect human security, but also feature proposals for the authorities, civil society organisations and the community.

The capacity for critical reflection, potential action, and the desire to overcome adversity in their communities despite living in very difficult contexts of insecurity, were evident in these cities.

In order to contribute to the local and national debate, we also share some ideas that can help us move **“Towards a Human Security Agenda for Mexico”**. Through the knowledge we have co-produced, we hope to contribute to the construction of a form of security provision in Mexico which does not reproduce violence.

¹In Acapulco, we spoke to Afro descendant women and indigenous men and women, but increasing violence levels in the city, and in the neighbourhood in particular, prevented us from carrying out planned activities.

APATZINGÁN

The first constitution of Latin America was signed in this emblematic municipality of Michoacán, in the region of Tierra Caliente. This place is known for the production and export of fruit and vegetables but also for complex security issues related to the production of illicit drugs and struggles amongst different groups and the state, which have caused very high levels of violence.

In Apatzingán, 63 residents of populous **neighbourhood Lázaro Cárdenas** and the research team constructed a **Local Human Security Agenda** that identifies the problems that most concern people, as well as some ideas and proposals for action for different actors.



These are the priority **issues** according to the neighbourhood residents:



Personal safety

- ▶ Aggressions, assaults and robberies
- ▶ Youths being recruited by criminal groups



Political security

- ▶ Poorly informed citizens with obstacles to their autonomous organisation
- ▶ Lack of trust in the authorities



Community safety

- ▶ Families under stress and falling apart
- ▶ Appeal of the narco culture
- ▶ Spaces that make it difficult for people to love and enjoy their city
- ▶ Neglect and abandonment of the elderly



Economic security

- ▶ Precarious and low-quality employment
- ▶ Threatened and hijacked local economy



Women's safety

- ▶ Domestic violence



Health security

- ▶ Drug addiction and hopelessness



Environmental security

- ▶ Degradation of the soil and the environment

Silenced issues

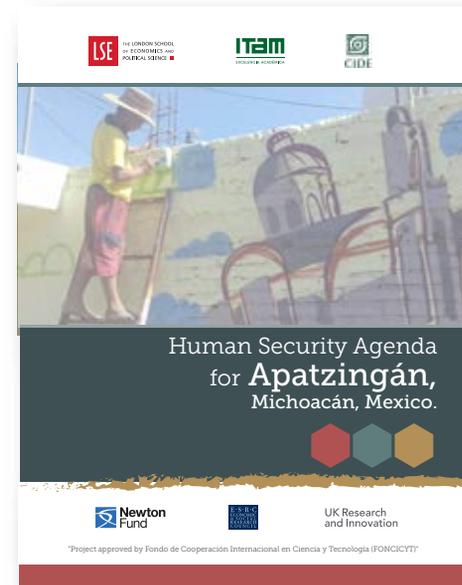
Apart from these issues prioritised by the community, there are some other problems that are difficult to discuss with people and, as such, remain hidden and silenced. However, these issues deeply affect the well-being of the population:

INCREMENTAL TRAUMA

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

What can be done in Apatzingán regarding these issues?

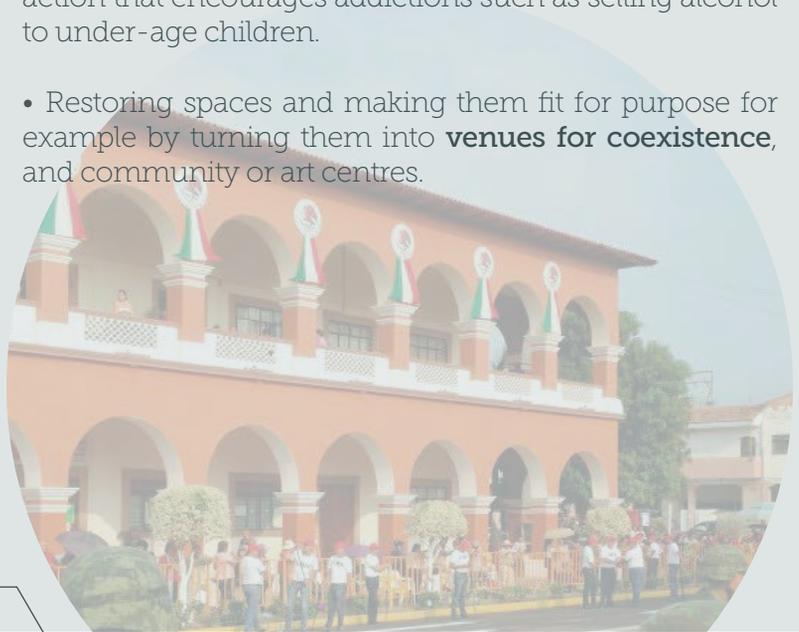
Our **Human Security Agenda for Apatzingán** includes proposals and ideas for the authorities, civil society organisations and the community, which seek to contribute to the solution of issues that affect human security dimensions. These are some of the proposals that can be found in our agenda:



PROPOSALS FOR **THE AUTHORITIES**

- Police forces should be **trained to care for victims**, they should have a spirit of service to the community, and they should be prepared and well-equipped to deal with criminals without committing human rights violations.
- The government should make a serious commitment to the victims of crime so that they **have effective access to justice**, which includes the reparation of damage, and access to counselling that allows them to resume their lives.
- **Women's criminal complaints should be shielded** to avoid once again becoming victims of aggression by the prosecution or for choosing not to keep quiet.
- The authorities should **acknowledge crimes that keep being committed** in our municipality, in particular those that affect our jobs, like extortion. If the authorities insist those crimes do not exist and if they do not guarantee the conditions for citizens to confidently complain, those issues will remain unresolved.

- Delivering different public services offered by various governmental entities to communities in order to **reach those who need them the most**, thus making them more accessible to everyone.
- **Making legal economic activities more appealing** than illegal ones, simplifying procedures and penalising slot machines, the sale of counterfeit goods and any other action that encourages addictions such as selling alcohol to under-age children.
- Restoring spaces and making them fit for purpose for example by turning them into **venues for coexistence, and community or art centres**.



PROPOSALS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Raising awareness in the community about the different forms of violence that we use and suffer from in our personal relationships and in different spaces, both public and private.
- Creating, disseminating and strengthening **women's networks** to support and defend each other. These networks should be accompanied by legal advisers and psychologists.
- Offering female entrepreneurial training and support regarding employment, knowledge of public programs and how to negotiate agreements with companies.
- Organising education, arts and sports activities to foster a healthy collective spirit and the pride that can be taken from public and honest achievements.
- Carrying out nocturnal activities in the neighbourhoods to recover public spaces for young people at times that are really convenient to our municipality.

PROPOSALS FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Involving more **youths** in citizen participation activities so they can present workshops on crime prevention and overall well-being themselves.
- Fostering **community activities**, like street cleaning or neighbours' meetings, to promote coexistence and communal appropriation of public spaces.
- Strengthening relationships between parents and children through weekly activities coordinated with schools' management teams.
- Getting organised to write down demands for the government -signed by everybody- regarding quality transport and security.
- Demanding the fulfilment of promises made by politicians to the community during campaigns and a change in the law to remove from office those who do not do their job.
- Fostering solidarity amongst citizens and challenging indifference and apathy to problems.

TIJUANA

This is “where the country starts” and where the continuous and dynamic economic, cultural and social exchange between Mexico and its neighbours -north and south- can be felt. This diverse and vibrant city, which embraces Mexicans and migrants from different places, is today a “city of opportunities” but also of many challenges. On a daily basis, the most marginalised communities experience the huge gap between the growth of the local economy, social development and the well-being of its population, and security and violence-related issues caused by conflicts amongst organised criminal groups as well as by the state's response to these groups.



In Tijuana, 61 residents of the populous **neighbourhood Sánchez Taboada**, where young people represent a big part of the population, prioritised, together with the research team, the following issues:



Political security

- The police are an actor that makes us feel unsafe
- A state that is not present to protect us
- A neighbourhood divided "from above" by clientelism



Environmental security

- A neighbourhood besieged by contamination



Personal safety

- Violence caused by drug dealing
- Robbery and extortion without anybody to turn to



Community safety

- Division and lack of trust within the community



Economic security

- There is employment, but it is not conducive to living well



Invisible insecurities

Apart from the issues prioritised by the community, we identified the following problems that are kept “invisible” and, in some cases, are considered private or even normal:

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND
SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**DEEP IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON
FAMILIES AND ESPECIALLY ON
CHILDREN**

**AUTHORITARIAN RESPONSES TO
HELPLESSNESS**

**PRECARIOUS EDUCATION AND
LIMITED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**



What can be done in Tijuana regarding these issues?

These are some of the ideas and proposals that can be found in our **Local Human Security Agenda for the neighbourhood Sánchez Taboada** and that we hope can materialise through collaborative work amongst different actors:



PROPOSALS FOR THE AUTHORITIES

- Designing and executing a **“strategic environmental scheme”** that involves the community, the state and civil society.
- Designing and implementing an **education scheme at state and municipal** levels in terms of infrastructure and equipment to improve the availability and reach of secondary basic and further education for young people, particularly in areas with higher levels of marginalisation.
- Creating and implementing - in a participatory way- a **relocation plan for the disaster area**. Envisaging, in turn, a scheme of psychosocial support to address the impact of loss.

PROPOSALS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Designing and implementing a **"community support lab"** in our neighbourhood together with Camino Verde to foster community organisation, the promotion of arts, culture and sports, and formal and non-formal education for young people, drawing from lessons learned by civil organisations active in the area.
- Encouraging coordination between the business sector and the relevant authorities to generate **decent employment opportunities for youths** from areas with higher levels of rights violations.
- Generating agreements between the government and businesspeople regarding the **improvement of working conditions** and the creation of flexible working hours.

PROPOSALS FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Creating **gathering spaces** for the community to build trust and nurture a **sense of belonging**, through the use of community centres as the driving force behind community life.
- Occupying the streets with games and arts and taking advantage of the initiative of "joy brigades" from *Oratorio Salesiano*, church fairs, and the return of the Spring carnival that used to be carried out together with educational institutions.
- Creating **citizen monitoring committees** in the neighbourhood as organisational processes for the community and not for political parties.



GUADALUPE

Located in the metropolitan area of Monterrey, one of the areas with the highest levels of economic and industrial growth in the country, Guadalupe is today a municipality inhabited by working people who came from other regions looking for opportunities and to improve the lives of their families. In spite of their drive, residents -mostly young people- live in the highest levels of poverty in Monterrey and have been through very hard times. During 2008 and 2011, the municipality, similarly to the rest of Nuevo León, was hijacked by armed conflicts between the armed forces and criminal groups and by violence amongst organised criminal groups.

In Guadalupe, 61 residents of the neighbourhood **Nuevo Almaguer**, who live at the foot of the emblematic Cerro de la Silla, constructed their **Local Human Security Agenda** together with the research team.



In the agenda they identified the following issues as the greatest concerns for the community:



Personal safety

- Presence of drug dealers and robberies
- Alcohol and drug consumption on street corners



Community safety

- A stigmatised community
- Difficult coexistence amongst neighbours
- A neighbourhood with precarious spaces and services



Women's safety

- Disappearances
- Domestic violence
- We want to participate, but we face many obstacles



Economic security

- Fear of losing our assets



Youths' safety

- Stigmatisation and accusations
- More aggression than protection from the police
- No jobs or opportunities to live well
- We want to participate, but how?

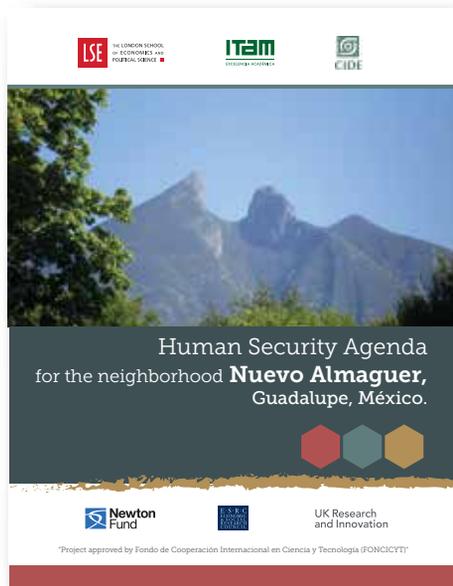


Political security

- Forms of political participation that fuel confrontation amongst us
- Difficulties in organising ourselves

What can be done in Guadalupe regarding these issues?

These are some of the proposals that can be found in our Human Security Agenda for Nuevo Almaguer and that seek to solve issues that affect human security in this neighbourhood:



PROPOSALS FOR THE AUTHORITIES

- Involving the whole community in the resolution of community conflicts through **mediation instruments** that foster dialogue.
- Supporting the community in the search for alternatives to **reintegrate and rehabilitate** our neighbours who sell or use drugs instead of criminalising them.
- Creating **community nurseries** ran by women from the community to promote their employment and help them turn into agents of change.
- Improving police training around **human rights and matters concerning youths** so that police officers improve their relationship with the community, especially with young people.

- Funding activities to prepare students for entrance examinations for schools at all levels in the neighbourhood, **led by youths** from Nuevo Almaguer.
- Rotating advocates who are intermediaries between the community and the government and **keep us up-to-date** regarding the resources and benefits allocated to the community.
- Carrying out a **notarial day** in the community with legal advisors and officials to talk about the deeds related to our land and reach agreements with the community.

PROPOSALS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

- Giving **continuity and permanence** to employment programs for young people in the neighbourhood, especially those that foster coexistence and training to study or work.
- Promoting activities to **collectively reconstruct the history** of our neighbourhood to be able to recognise people who have been important in the community, like the elderly, leaders, and youths that have made a difference.
- Supporting young people and adults with **counselling and addiction specialists**. Working also with addicts' families and friends to help them understand their feelings and the negative character of drug use in order to facilitate their rehab.
- Implementing programs regarding violence which are **targeted at men**.

PROPOSALS FOR **THE COMMUNITY**

- Weekly meetings in public spaces or in our own houses to discuss improvements for the neighbourhood in a **relaxed environment** that helps us feel closer.
- Speaking to our children, siblings or acquaintances who may be inclined to steal or sell drugs in order to help them understand the implications of their actions on **their lives and their community**.
- Organising cultural activities such as “dance battles” to **improve relations** and help solve differences amongst neighbours’ groups.
- Setting up meetings for women from different parts of the neighbourhood to do daily things together and **create support networks** which allow us to get closer and to take action when one of us is going through a difficult situation of violence or insecurity.
- **Getting organised** and putting forward proposals to the government in order to legalise our houses, including carrying out community work days.



Towards a Human Security Agenda for Mexico:



For a Security That Does Not Reproduce Violence

Based on our work with residents of neighbourhoods in Tijuana, Acapulco, Apatzingán and Guadalupe, we identified ideas that can contribute to thinking over the national security agenda in Mexico. These are some of the proposals that can be found in our **National Human Security Agenda:**

The current situation in Mexico cannot be explained exclusively as a result of reorganisations in the criminal world and the race for the exploitation of illegal economies -especially drug-trafficking- since 2007. In the country, there are multiple insecurities and types of violence constantly interconnected in a context of growing criminal economies, corruption and impunity. This complex issue cannot be resolved with a unidimensional security policy. On the contrary, it requires recognising the threats, vulnerabilities, risks, anxieties and fears that are affecting personal and collective well-being and rights, as well as the capacity to exercise and defend such rights.

The answers to the crisis the country is going through should recognise local complexities and should be guided by the following principles:

Essential principles for a public policy of human security in Mexico

1. Protection that is efficient, egalitarian and respectful of human rights by state actors aimed at reducing violence.
2. Targeting state actions not against “enemies” or military objectives but to address the social roots of crime and the effects of the violent crisis on the population, as well as to interrupt the reproduction of violence.
3. Make confidence and consistency amongst all state institutions in charge of implementing security policies at a state, federal and municipal level a pivotal element of security policies.
4. Recover the democratic focus of public security policies so that it enables citizen participation in the transformation of conditions and factors that reproduce violence and crime, and avoids fomenting expressions of “authoritarian citizenship”.

To **eradicate factors that reproduce chronic violence** in Mexico, we identified, together with the communities, the following requirements:

- Identifying the different **kinds of violence** (not all of them resulting from crime) that are constantly changing each local context, as well as the processes and factors that are contributing to their reproduction.
- Actively involving **women and youths** in strategies to respond to violence, considering them as main actors who can help construct diagnoses and identify and implement solutions instead of just as victims or potential perpetrators in their communities.
- Make all **violence socially unacceptable**, no matter where it comes from or who the victim is.
- Recognising, **evaluating and addressing the traumatic and progressive effects** of the prolonged exposure to high levels of violence and insecurity on people and communities.

Public policies of security provisions must be humanised, and the state must mobilise different actors and sectors of society around new strategies against chronic violence and human insecurity, based on the recognition of the victims and the rejection of violence as a tool. For this, we need:

- A focus on factors that enable the **reproduction of violence** in social relations, at home, in the community and in institutions and political processes.
- **Recognition of the victims** and involving them in the design of public security policies.
- To bridge the gap between interventions designed in the highest echelons of government and their local implementation through the **inclusion of local actors**, members of civil organisations and citizens groups in the process of design, implementation and assessment of interventions.
- **Restoring trust in the police** through anticorruption policies and multifaceted training for police forces, which help reduce the collusion between police officers and criminal groups.

Local capacities must be strengthened to deactivate violence and reduce its impact through **inclusive and sustained work WITH the communities**. In order to improve these capacities in the communities and amongst local actors, it is essential to:

- Create **independent opportunities and spaces** to gather and connect within the communities, protecting and supporting citizens who decide to actively participate to improve human security in their communities.
- **Confront clientelism** from political parties which weakens and divides communities and denies them equal access to services that the state has an obligation to provide.
- **Integrate women and young people** in the design and implementation of responses to violence and insecurity.

