



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



EXCELENCIA ACADÉMICA



**NATIONAL AGENDA**  
**TOWARDS A HUMAN SECURITY**  
**AGENDA FOR MEXICO:**  
FOR A SECURITY THAT DOES NOT REPRODUCE VIOLENCE



UK Research  
and Innovation

"Project approved by Fondo de Cooperación Internacional en Ciencia y Tecnología (FONCICYT)"

# Our Team

## Coordinating Team

Jenny Pearce  
Rafael Fernández de Castro Medina  
Gema Karina Santamaría Balmaceda  
Catheryn Camacho  
Cecilia Farfán Méndez  
Alexandra Abello Colak

## Researchers -Acapulco Team

Javiera Yanina Donoso Jiménez  
Miguel Albarrán Mejía  
Raúl Aldair Barrera Cortés

## Researchers -Apatzingan Team

Luz Paula Parra Rosales  
Eduardo David Pérez Lara  
Julio César Franco Gutiérrez  
Alan Pavel Vallejo Chavarría

## Researchers -Guadalupe Team

Juan Salgado Ibarra  
Cristina Nohemí Gallegos González  
Elvia Paulina Badillo García  
Nayla Karely Samaniego Salinas

## Tijuana Team

Nohora Constanza Niño Vega  
Luis Antonio Flores Flores  
Brenda Raquel Cortez Velázquez

## Consultants

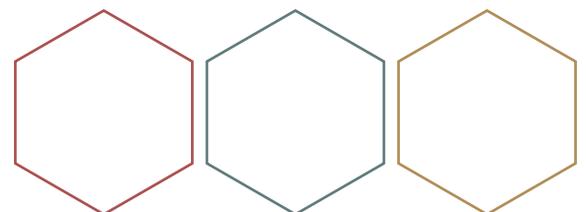
Falko Ernst  
Armando Rodríguez Luna  
Vidal Fernando Romero León  
Lina Zuluaga García\*  
María Isela Quintero\*  
\*Asesoras del Observatorio de  
Seguridad Humana de Medellín

## Editorial Design and Print

Edgar J. Bolaños Sapién  
OCTO DESIGN

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# *Who are we and what are our findings?*

The alarming increase in violence and insecurity levels is one of the most important challenges facing the new Mexican government led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. This paper seeks to contribute to the national debate on how to address this challenge. It draws from key findings and recommendations following a two-year research process (2016-2018) carried out collaboratively amongst London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in the United Kingdom, *Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM)* and *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE)*, with the support of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT)* through the Newton Fund and *Fondo de Cooperación Internacional en Ciencia y Tecnología (FONCICYT)*.

This research process is based on a participatory research methodology<sup>1</sup> geared towards social action and transformation, which recognises that different social sectors can offer important contributions to the national debate on security. Based on this methodology, we have analysed, together with residents of some of the hardest hit neighbourhoods, the issues of violence, crime and insecurity affecting them, as well as possible actions to address them. We call this process of respectful interaction between academics and members of the communities “co-construction”. The neighbourhoods are located in four Mexican cities with severe, albeit distinctive, levels of violence: Acapulco (Guerrero), Apatzingán (Michoacán), Guadalupe (Nuevo León) and Tijuana (Baja California).

Our most important finding is that the violence that now sweeps across 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.

**The issue that Mexico confronts is more complex, with multiple insecurities and types of violence interconnected in a context of growing criminal economies, corruption and impunity. This interaction between different kinds of insecurity and violence cannot be resolved with a unidimensional security policy.** On the contrary, it requires recognising the threats, risks, vulnerabilities, anxieties and fears that affect personal and collective well-being and rights, and the capacity to exercise and defend such rights. The concept that better captures this interconnection is that of “human security”, and we have used it as the basis of our research.

Drawing from our findings, we offer ideas and proposals to construct a **National Security Agenda** based on the local context and priorities we have identified together with those who experience these multiple kinds of insecurity and violence. Prioritising based on the local context forces people to avoid thinking sequentially about security provision, i.e. avoid assuming that pacifying and preventing need to take place first so that then social investments can be made in the area.

On the contrary, our approach favours dialogue between social policies and security policies to improve their efficacy and response capacity in a way that is consistent and coherent with the complexity of the problem of violence and insecurity. Thus, human security can guide public policy priorities without turning into a framework so wide it paralyses them, making them inefficient or impossible to implement.

Our research shows that it is possible to carry out the **prioritisation jointly with the communities through the co-construction** of Local Human Security Agendas. Therefore, this proposal for a human security national agenda is co-constructed from the local.

<sup>1</sup> The methodology to “co-construct human security agendas” was developed by Observatorio de Seguridad Humana de Medellín together with community organisations in the city, Professor Jenny Pearce and Dr Alexandra Abello Colak.

Based on our research, we have also identified **four general and key principles** that could guide a human security public policy that addresses local and national security challenges. These principles are:

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".

With the knowledge of the communities and academia, we aim to contribute to the conceptual debate and public policies regarding violence and insecurity in Mexico.

## ***Context of our process of co-construction of human security from below***

Our research process analysed the problem and possible solutions "**from below**", i.e. from the perspectives of those who experience violence and insecurity, with people's daily experiences, needs, expectations and proposals regarding security at the heart of our project.

In all four cities, we worked with women -young and old-, youths -within and outside academic environments-, adult men, and some members of civil and religious associations.<sup>2</sup>

Our objective has been opening spaces so that people's voices are heard in the debate about security, thus contributing to promoting a notion of **security as a public good that is effective, accessible and able to reduce multiple forms of violence**.

This process allowed us to construct, together with the people, a diagnosis of the problems that affect their human security, and to identify ideas and proposals to address them, which were recorded in **Local Human Security Agendas**.<sup>3</sup> These agendas were developed in neighbourhoods of three of the four cities where we worked: Apatzingán, Guadalupe and Tijuana, and they were discussed with state and non-state actors in each context. In Acapulco, conditions were not conducive for our researchers to co-construct the agenda.

These Local Agendas note that responses to insecurity should recognise local complexities and should be guided by a series of principles shared by all actors concerned. One of these principles is that **safe and reliable participation spaces should be created** so that residents can debate the roots and solutions to the issues of violence and insecurity. From our research experience, we believe that these spaces can turn the reduction of violence into a gradual, inclusive and sustainable process.



<sup>2</sup> In the case study in Acapulco, we spoke to Afro descendant women and indigenous men and women, but the degradation of security conditions due to increasing violence rates in the city, and in the neighbourhood in particular, prevented us from carrying out planned activities.

Without a democratic and efficient approach from the state and civil society, some residents end up accepting repressive solutions that negate others' human rights. Although these solutions seem effective and "quick", in reality they reproduce violence and insecurity. Through respectful interactions between academics and members of the community in our process of co-construction, we have tried to recognise the longings behind such authoritarian and repressive preferences whilst questioning them and opening a debate about possible alternatives.

## ***From violent insecurity to human security: diagnosing the problem from below***

The analysis of the ways in which the residents of the neighbourhoods live and survive security issues reveals that their lives are not only affected by new and changing forms of crime, but also by a phenomenon that we call chronic violence.

Chronic violence is a kind of violence that is reproduced in every socialisation space and over generations, taking different forms and mutating in time. It includes lethal and non-lethal violence such as disappearances, forced displacement, domestic violence, and police abuse, amongst others. Chronic violence deeply affects the way people relate to each other and to state institutions, the spaces they inhabit and their prospects.

Together with crime, chronic violence has dangerous individual and collective traumatic implications not only for citizens but also for democracy and citizen participation. The despair and suspicion they raise -from homicides to abusive behaviour at home, in the neighbourhood, and in public institutions such as schools and prisons- enable a repressive state whose use of force leads to the deterioration of citizens' trust in it.

### **1. Chronic violence in Mexico**

The insecurity that people are currently experiencing in the country is the result of multiple forms of violence that take place in different spaces, are exercised by a great variety of actors and persist over time.

Beyond identifying causal relationships between factors and violence, one of the main challenges is identifying the multiple types of violence (not all of them of criminal nature or contingent to material gain) that are concatenated, superposed and reproduced. The social, economic, institutional, political and community context in each city is key to deciphering how the reproduction of violence takes place and how to deactivate chronic violence.

It is essential to recognise that homicidal violence is just one type of violence in the more complex constellation that includes different types of violence that, though non-lethal, damage, hurt and debilitate communities. Diagnoses centred on homicide rates or criminal phenomena such as drug trafficking tend to make those other types of violence invisible and oversimplify what is a more dynamic problem.

Due to the inadequacy of diagnoses focused on homicides and drug-trafficking, people generate narratives to explain the problem trying to make sense of the insecurity and violence they experience. Nevertheless, these explanations do not necessarily stem from accurate diagnoses. Furthermore, they often become significant obstacles to addressing the problem. One example are narratives which justify violence or minimise its severity by accepting that lethal violence only affects those involved in criminal activities and not

the rest of society. This stigmatises victims of violence and makes the issues and impacts of insecurity invisible and simplifies them. On the contrary, **all violence must be socially unacceptable, no matter where it comes from** or who the victim is.

Official diagnostics and explanatory narratives in the localities have also robbed young people of their capacity to play a leading role in the solutions as they are only seen as perpetrators, victims or potential violent actors who need intervention before they become a problem to society. In our research communities, they are a criminalised group of the population.

They are stigmatised and even deemed **"socially hopeless"**. Prejudice regarding young people nowadays should be eliminated, social imaginaries around youth should be reconstructed, and young people should be recognised and included in different ways as actors able to contribute to the social transformation of their communities.

Gender violence and aggression within the private domestic space are some of the most silenced non-lethal forms of violence there is. Nonetheless, they probably have the deepest impact on children and teenager's upbringing, and they tend to determine the future. The damage caused by violently punishing children and when they witness abuse and aggression that hurt and exclude their mothers is inestimable. In Apatzingán we identified that domestic violence is also committed against elderly people. Both elderly men and women are subject to be belittled, made invisible and abused.

Chronic violence has a deep impact on victims and their families and on the general population (mental problems, loss of socialisation spaces, breaking bonds, and stigmatisation, amongst other). In our case studies, we identified that long-term exposure to violence has caused individual and collective trauma that hinder the recognition of solutions and require support for affected communities. These traumas are passed on to the next generations, intensifying and contributing to violence mutations, i.e. new forms of violence.

There are many mental health issues amongst residents of the four communities, especially amongst women and teenagers. In Acapulco and in Tijuana, we spoke to young people who have lost family members and loved ones, have witnessed acts of brutality and cruelty or have seen dismembered bodies. They live in constant anxiety and feel imminent danger on their way to school every day.

These situations need to be taken into account when we think about human security and about the role of state institutions. They force us to ask ourselves, for example, how do public institutions officials responsible for security provision treat victims of sexual violence, children who constantly suffer violent punishment, and young people who live in high-risk situations?

*"We have always said it, they're killing the people they have to kill [...] people involved in that kind of job: drug dealing, lookout. But people who have nothing to do with that are safe, unless they are mistaken or attacked."*

*Civil society member, Acapulco*

*"If you are not good at killing, you are good to kill."*

*Line of a song by Banda MS that youths often repeat in Apatzingán*

*"¡Oh, yes! In our case, yes. I wake up and tell my daughter: since then, they've have taken away our peace and tranquility. Because you wake up with this feeling in your heart of what's going to happen? The noise wakes you up because you can hear shooting... you can hear cars or a motorcycle... or you hear shots."*

*Widow mother, Apatzingán.*



## 1.1 Insecurity as a daily experience

Our research reveals that in some of the most vulnerable areas in Mexico, daily experiences of insecurity amongst the neighbourhood's residents are closely related to the level of well-being at home and their perception of lack of protection and abandonment regarding a multitude of problems that deteriorate their quality of life.<sup>3</sup> These residents long for an effective and dignifying intervention by state representatives.

**Multiple insecurities cause frustration** and distressing experiences in people's daily lives and generate conditions conducive to chronic violence. Unsatisfied basic needs meet physical violence when they create tension within families and make citizens feel their future is a dead-end. In many of these contexts, choosing illegality and criminality can become socially acceptable as the only way to provide for your family.

The concept of security and its provision must be humanised. Violence must not be generated in the name of security, as is the case in some of the contexts we worked in, where victims are re-victimised in different instances instead of obtaining justice.

*"Paying attention to waste collection, street lightning [...] not forgetting about the neighbourhoods, because of you see, they pay a lot more attention to the seafront road, it gets the most attention because it is a main road, but the neighbourhoods are forgotten, left behind and forgotten."*

*Resident of the community, Acapulco*

## 2. Crime and violence

Our research suggests that one of the most important priority tasks in Mexico is interrupting social dynamics that connect exclusion, violence and crime.

Chronic violence in the most affected communities takes place in a context characterised by the consolidation and transformation of organised criminal groups. Because of this, it is very important to **differentiate between violence and crime**. Not all violence is criminal and not every crime is violent. Some criminal groups are selective in the use of violence, whilst for others, it is an essential component of their business model.

Although the population prefers situations where violence is more selective, and its aims are less vague, they always recognise the latent threat. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the social and political dynamics that favour the reproduction of violence and to understand when and how crime and violence combine.

In extremely poor communities, it is common for some young people to get involved in illegal activities through minor crime. The issue quickly escalates when organised criminal groups take advantage of these first experiences to offer a support network for more serious crime, recruiting young people with very limited options and expectations or who feel attracted by the possibility of gaining respect, recognition and purchasing power; nevertheless, they pay a very high price: a short life.

*"My eldest son was forced to take part [as a hit man], and then his brothers wanted to be like him. Now he's dead and one of his brothers is in jail."*

*Mother, Apatzingán*

<sup>3</sup> People's well-being respond to their perception of their lives vis a vis different dimensions of human security.

In Apatzingán, for example, where there are few spaces for recreational activities for young people, slot machines -though illegal- are openly used in the streets by the elderly, children and youths. In these spaces, it is easy for organised criminal groups to recruit as "lookouts", vulnerable youths and children who have started to develop an addiction to those games, as they show an inclination to and special interest in risk and chance. In Tijuana, we were told about youngsters who had been excluded from social groups -for example, from football teams- and during their teenage years were prone to looking for other ways to counteract exclusion, be it by belonging to a gang or consuming illegal substances. This eventually led to their involvement in selling drugs.

The reorganisations and competitive dynamics amongst criminal groups to control the local markets as well as, in some cases, the diversification of their criminal activities have a deep impact on communities, especially when they trigger conflict amongst those groups. Violent competition amongst them as well as the militarised state response can cause panic and alter the use of public spaces, damaging social interactions and generating high levels of anxiety and stress.

They can also give way to recruiting and drug addiction risks for youths. However, not every young person who consumes drugs wants to take part in organised crime. In Guadalupe, we met young people who smoke marijuana in public places, and the police are violent towards them and treat them as future criminals. Instead of getting guidance, support, and alternatives, young people get beaten and sometimes tortured by the police. This kind of response does not prevent drug use; it motivates it and generates violent behaviour. Young people see police officers as violent actors to be feared, instead of as protectors and reliable state actors.

The perception that the police is involved or participates in criminal dynamics has a deep impact that amplifies the feeling of helplessness of the population and their mistrust of municipal institutions. In Tijuana, many people fear coming across municipal police officers and say they have been threatened when they have requested help and protection. They are sure the police benefits from drug dealing. In Apatzingán, the perception of collusion and links between the authorities and organised crime increases the lack of confidence and restricts a more constructive relationship to face the problems of violence.

The presence of illegal armed criminal actors is an obstacle to neighbours taking a leading role in the solutions and developing community initiatives. In some cases, these actors co-opt citizen initiatives, and in others, they promote a society that readily accepts multiple illegal ways to make money.

*"I've always said it: Watch out for police officers because they rob more than robbers, because they have permission to [...] and they are accomplices to robbers."*

*Resident of the community, Acapulco*

*"In little corner shops we know (I am not going to say where or any names) officers of the federal ministerial police come and take their money."*

*Focal group with men, Tijuana*

### 3. About the state's response

Compared to the dynamic character of chronic violence -in its many different forms and capacities to reproduce itself-, current institutional responses show serious limitations. The Mexican state, in its different levels and through various governmental units, has implemented a variety of responses to the rise in violence and insecurity, from the use of lethal force by the Armed Forces to crime prevention programs. However, these efforts focus on the most visible symptoms of violence and insecurity or on identifying risk factors.

The war on drugs has reinforced a vision that justifies the use of violence against "enemies", citizens or groups which are identified as criminal or dangerous, without a due judicial process. **Social acceptance of a heavy-handed approach and the sacrifice of human rights** in the name of security are partly the result of narratives and practices that justify violence to restrain it but end up reproducing it. We identified such attitudes in our communities:

*"So we say, 'it seems we'd rather have hit-men taking care of us than the government', we say 'between the government and the hit-men, we choose the hit-men... because I have a friend there, a relative is there... the actual leader of the gang is my friend."*

Father, Apatzingán

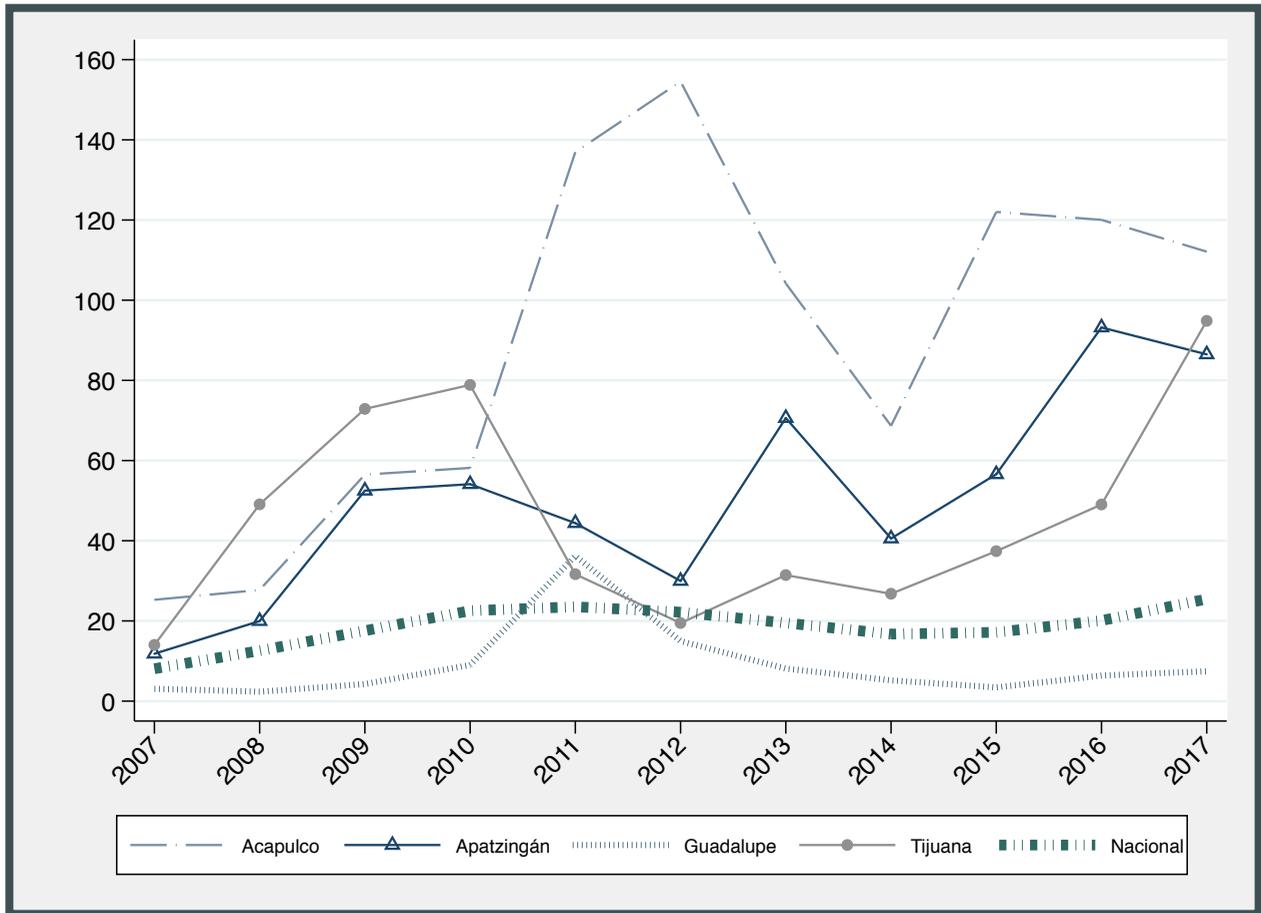
*"For many years, police officers have not been able to touch criminals because it is the officer that gets detained. So, I'm not sure if it's good or bad, but it was them who advised us to take justice into our own hands."*

Neighbourhood of area 4, Tijuana

The state itself is responsible for the reproduction of violence in different circumstances thus losing legitimacy. Without a security policy able to interrupt the reproduction of violence based on non-violent means, the state becomes another actor that reproduces violence. This is because several of its institutions have developed complex relationships -of negotiation and/or coexistence- with illegal armed actors. It is also because responses have been accompanied by narratives that condone violence and even violations of people's fundamental rights for the sake of security.

Repressive responses by the state against insecurity have forced citizens to choose between violent mandates imposed by the state through heavy-handed belligerent policies, and violence reproduced by criminal actors competing between them. This leaves citizens in constant fear for their lives. In Tijuana, people we spoke to prefer the "order" the state imposed on the city through repressive actions against criminal groups after 2008, to the indiscriminate levels of violence caused by conflict between those groups. In Apatzingán, in different individual and collective interviews, people "longingly" mentioned the [Caballeros] Templarios, as with them at least there was order and there were no thieves. In other words, people prefer high levels of selective violence to living amongst indiscriminate violence and impunity caused by conflicts between the state and criminal groups, amongst criminal groups or within criminal groups.

## Homicide rate per 100 000 residents in our case studies 2007-2017



Fuente: Elaboración propia con datos del INEGI y CONAPO

### 3.1 The state and the co-construction of security

Security should be seen as the result of the collective construction of capabilities to counteract the reproduction of violence. This doesn't mean that the state should delegate its basic functions and responsibilities. The responsibility to provide public security and to address the problem of violence lies primarily with the Mexican state. However, the state should be willing to design responses that better adapt to local realities through the participation and contribution of community actors. We cannot assume that a security strategy can be effective across the country without clearly understanding the different effects insecurity and violence have on citizens, governmental actors, and their relationship to the institutional framework.

The state needs the capacity to 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. Recognising the victims in the design of public security policies allows for the visibility of trauma caused by losing a loved one or surviving an act of extreme violence. It also minimises the risk posed by



*"[...] if you report something, you know the same one that registers your case will be the one to give you away so that something happens to you."*

*Father, Acapulco*

*"It's worse when it is a police officer who intimidates you and steals from you because you expect that from criminals, but when the person that is supposed to protect you harms you, you end up completely alone and vulnerable... so where do you go?"*

*Mother, Apatzingán*

seeking personal revenge in a context of very high levels of impunity. Therefore, humanised security should be accessible to all. It's a public good for everybody's well-being; it should be promoted by the state according to the rule of law and in order to promote trust in its institutions. Currently, in the communities we worked with, we witnessed a profound lack of trust in these institutions

The process of co-construction requires patience, presence and the capacity to listen without judgement. It is necessary to take into account all the experiences of violence that affect subjects and their participation. It is an arduous journey. In our efforts towards co-construction, we also found a lot of silence. People do not always want to share their opinion or make it public or talk about topics like violence and security. In our experience we found that men are often more reluctant to speak than women, although the latter face many obstacles to actively participating as members of the community.

We confirmed the existence of a significant gap between interventions designed at the federal level and implementations at the local level. For example, although preventative policies that benefit citizens have been agreed, implementation at the local level is still difficult. Young people still feel stigmatised and victimised by indiscriminate police policies. Including local actors, members of civil organisations and citizens groups in the process of design, implementation and assessment of interventions is key to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Simultaneously, decisions should be viable in the different local contexts. Therefore, we suggest a constant dialogue around proposals at federal, state and municipal levels.

Amongst other metrics, the police should be assessed and evaluated according to their relationship of mutual respect with the community and not only the number of criminals they clear from the streets. In the communities we worked with, the relationship between the neighbourhood residents and police officers and officials from the security sector is difficult and, in some cases, even violent and hostile. In Apatzingán, due to a perceived lack of an effective security strategy, groups of neighbours organised themselves to carry out surveillance tasks. At the beginning, when they managed to apprehend an offender, they would hand them in to the police; however, they realised that police officers would soon let them go (if not immediately). This not only dramatically reduced trust in the police but also re-victimised citizens.

The state, cooperation agencies and some civil organisations have offered responses that have not always made communities more resilient to the different manifestations of human insecurity and violence that they experience. In Nuevo Almaguer, Guadalupe, although the government, civil associations and international cooperation agencies have deployed an important number of interventions and programs, these have failed to have a visible and enduring effect on residents. Even though civil organisations like Voluntarios en Equipo Trabajando por la Superación con Amor A.C (Vetsa) have tried to create self-managed neighbourhood committees, the lack of follow-up due to the short-term nature of budgets for these programs narrows the possibility of promoting agency amongst neighbours of the community, leaving them feeling used and abandoned.

Security strategies should include -as one of their main objectives- strengthening local capacities to counteract violence and reduce its impact. For this to happen, it is necessary to work with the communities in an inclusive and sustained manner.

## 4. The role of businesspeople

Despite being key actors to face the challenges of insecurity owing to their organisational capacity to demand efficient responses from the state, we did not see any comprehensive responses or sense of urgency amongst businesses in any of the four cities of our research. Their views on violence are rather eclectic and partial.

In Acapulco, for example, business people in charge of organising the Citizens' Council for Security and Development in Guerrero insist on their publicity campaign motto: "say good things about Aca". This kind of initiatives that seek to protect tourism attempt to hide (without success) the issue of violence that the city experiences. In Tijuana, businesspeople in charge of public security councils have accurately diagnosed challenges in the city. Nevertheless, in spite of a major deterioration of security conditions and an alarming increase in the number of homicides in the last two years, they insist "things are a lot better than in 2008", as now violence does not result in massacres as was the case in the previous decade. This makes them mistakenly assume that it is contained.

What we did see in the four case studies is that **communities feel abandoned and unprotected** whilst there is a perception that businesspeople have access to security. In Acapulco, the community complains that security forces exclusively patrol and protect the area where hotels and tourists are. In Apatzingán, the only special surveillance scheme to improve security in the city in the last three years was largely funded by businesses to protect a specific perimeter: the business area. While the police look after shops, the rest of the community has to deal with insecurity resulting from the absence or inefficiency of a municipal police force that has not managed to recruit enough officers. In Tijuana, many of the CCTV cameras aimed at improving security are installed in residential and commercial areas that are key to the city, but not in the communities with the highest levels of homicidal violence and where they could gather important leads on events and crime victims.

Though people feel that businesspeople have access to security, crime and violence have had a direct impact on the development of local economies. Tourism has been severely affected in Acapulco, while in Apatzingán, medium-size commercial establishments have been burnt down, convenience stores have been attacked and robbed and roads that transport produce from the region to other parts of the country and exportation hubs have been blocked.

Furthermore, the impact of extortion targeted at very important economic activities in each locality has been deep. The lime agri-industry and livestock in Apatzingán, for example, have been particularly affected, while in Tijuana micro and small businesses have to pay daily blackmail fees that keep them under the siege of criminal groups and perpetuate their feeling of hopelessness and impunity.

**The state of the local economy, in turn, has an impact on violence and crime.** Without local employment, young people are exposed to other offers and the working culture is lost, something many older people complained about in the cities where we worked. In cities where there is employment, like Tijuana, long working hours and low salaries have a negative effect on family relationships and make young people think twice about the possibility of factory work.

## 5. Resilience and local capacities in the face of violence and insecurity

The research process revealed the deep impact long-term exposure to different types of violence has had on communities: today they are divided, weakened and fearful. The four neighbourhoods under review are areas where possibilities for peaceful gatherings and interactions have been lost, and where children and young people are constantly forced to stay home as a form of protection. They are areas where mistrust and fear end up breeding hopelessness, apathy and stigmatisation of certain groups considered guilty of the situation of insecurity. For example, residents we worked with in Tijuana claim that it is people from other states, like Sinaloa, "who brought drug-trafficking to our communities."

The capacity for resilience in the communities has decreased not only due to violence but also to clientelism and the way political parties and different government officials capitalise on their transactional relationship with the residents of the communities.

Political parties have contributed to division and community conflict; they have also limited participation and activism from the community to solve the problems that affect them, linking up only with those community leaders willing to work exclusively with them.

*"My children as such not now [...] I don't let them play outside [...] because in the pitch they can meet others doing bad stuff."*

*Resident of the community, Acapulco.*

*"These female leaders have... some control over these people ...That community is being slightly manipulated by those leaders... when they sit down with an official... more than a delegate or subdelegate they tell you: 'If you want to send aid and groceries, you need to tell me first (...) otherwise I will make sure nobody there gets the benefit.' '-But why do you do this if we are working for the common good, for the community, for their benefit?' '- I'm just telling you. If you are going to work, you will work according to... the way I work.' It has always been like that and no... there is no other way... to do differently."*

*Interview with a municipal official, Tijuana*

One of the ways violence is reproduced is through collective learnings. In this sense, not only armed actors linked to crime have internalised those behaviours. The residents of communities who have been exposed to high levels of violence have also internalised certain violent practices and, in some cases, use them to solve conflicts and problems in the community. In Guadalupe, for example, neighbours threaten each other with disappearances, which is a practice used in the context of wars between organised criminal groups. They try to solve personal and neighbourhood conflicts through threats. In Apatzingán, people we spoke to reported that some people say they are [Caballeros] Templarios to intimidate others.

Even in the most difficult contexts of violence, local actors always have the capacity to raise as main actors of affective responses. The process of construction of local agendas revealed the potential of generating spaces for critical reflection with residents of the communities most affected by insecurity. However, public action and participation are still dangerous for many. We stressed that silence affects the communities we have worked in. People fear mentioning the biggest problems and sometimes there are banned topics, which means that building resilience and the capacity for action requires a lot of professional support.

Participation of civil society organisations in the construction of social resilience and the empowerment of actors that take action against violence is paramount. In two of our case studies, Tijuana and Apatzingán, churches are very important spaces. They have become, in some cases, the only safe places for community gatherings -regardless of whether they are of a religious nature. In Guadalupe, several non-governmental organisations have periodically accompanied young people. However, their interventions often come to an end due to financial reasons or political changes. Also in Guadalupe, human rights organisations like Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos A.C. (CADHAC) have reported violent and abusive acts when nobody is could do it.

In every context we worked in, women showed the capacity and potential to play a pivotal role as agents of social transformation in their communities. Nevertheless, that potential is limited by unequal and violent gender relations. Integrating responses against chronic violence that allow women to improve the living conditions and health is urgent. These actions will have a multiplying effect in the community.

*“We have been fighting for our children’s well-being, bettering ourselves to get ahead for them, teaching them the best. Mothers always want the best for our children, we want them to have what we didn’t have. I don’t want my children to suffer what I suffered.”*

*Resident of the community, Acapulco*

*“We formed an association, we have a cooperative, [...] we are women and the majority of us is on their own ... , I am a widow, I don’t have children any more, but I need to live. I need to support myself, don’t I? [...] then we got together and said: we’re going to ask the government for help to support us and help us set up a business that we can run to support ourselves [...] -What’s the name of the Association? -Women who don’t give up. We work hard and never give up. United and forwards...”*

*Neighbour of Apatzingán*

## ***Towards security and protection strategies that do not reproduce violence***

This National Agenda for Human Security co-constructed from the community towards the state includes ideas and proposals from the Local Agendas constructed in three of the cities we worked in. Our agendas seek to **resignify security as a tool to reduce multiple types of violence and insecurities and enable democratic citizen participation.**

We hope that this document contributes to the national debate and to the confluence of different actors around the four principles we have mentioned as a guide for a security strategy that does not reproduce violence. Led by the State and with the participation of various economic and social sectors, members of civil society, residents of the most affected communities, academia and the international community, we propose **co-constructing a realistic agreement which resignifies and humanises Mexican security policy.**



Interventions to reduce the reproduction of violence and insecurity in each local context should be the result of **strategies that combine social policy and security policies** constructed with the participation of the communities. **Involving people** -especially young people, women and victims- in the prioritisation of issues and the design, implementation and evaluation of strategies can contribute to improving the resilience of communities and state and non-state actors towards the underlying context.

