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Violence Prevention in Guatemala

A mission report by the International
Centre for the Prevention of Crime,
commission by the *Open Society
Institute* and the *Fundación Soros-
Guatemala*.

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**with the collaboration
of Esteban BENAVIDES**

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Warning:

This report was originally written in French and it was translated into English and Spanish. The three versions are available on the ICPC website: <http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org/>

Every reference to this document must mention its authors (ICPC) as well as the commissioning institutions (*Open Society Institute* and *Soros Foundation Guatemala*).



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	3
List of Acronyms	4
Introduction	5
1. Issues in Violence Prevention in the Guatemalan Context	8
1.1 Ideas that are imprecise or cause confusion	8
1.2 A weak culture of prevention and a quasi non existent public policy	10
1.3 Actors are notably weak and dispersed	12
2. Promising areas of future development	16
2.1 Support citizen participation in local prevention policies	16
2.2 Foster clear orientations and ongoing political commitment at the national level	21
2.3 Abolish impunity by supporting victims and systematically documenting acts of violence	23
2.4 Develop interventions for youths who have the greatest difficulties	24
3. Suggested work methods	27
3.2 Follow-up of local projects through action-evaluation	29
3.3 An opportunistic approach to coordination between donors	31
3.4 Follow-up and internal organization	31
Conclusions	33
Appendixes	35

LIST OF ACRONYMS

APREDE	Asociación de Prevención de la Violencia
AUTUÉ	Asociación de Usuarios del Transporte Urbano y Extra-urbano
CEG	Centro de Estudios de Guatemala
CERIGUA	Centro de Reportes Informativos sobre Guatemala
CESC	Centro de Estudios de Seguridad Ciudadana (Universidad de Chile)
CICIG	Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala
CIPC	Centro Internacional para la Prevención de la Criminalidad
CNS	Consejo Nacional de Seguridad
CONAPREVI y Contra las Mujeres	Coordinadora Nacional para la Prevención de la Violencia Familiar y Contra las Mujeres
FLACSO	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
FSG	Fundación Soros Guatemala
ICCPG Guatemala	Instituto de Estudios Comparados de Ciencias Penales de Guatemala
IEPADES	Instituto de Enseñanza para el Desarrollo Sostenible
JLS	Juntas Locales de Seguridad
ODHAG	Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala
ONG	Organizaciones no gubernamentales
ONU	Organización de Naciones Unidas
OSI	Open Society Institute
PNC	Policía Nacional Civil
PNUD	Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo
REMHI	Informe de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica
SEDEM Democracia	Asociación para el Estudio y la Promoción de la Seguridad en Democracia
UNESCO la Cultura	Organización de Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura
UPCV	Unidad de Prevención Comunitaria de la Violencia
USAID	Agencia de Cooperación de los Estados Unidos
VAC	Viceministerio de Apoyo Comunitario

INTRODUCTION

This mission was entrusted to the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) by the Open Society Institute (OSI) with the collaboration of Fundación Soros–Guatemala (FSG). The aim was to conduct an assessment of violence in Guatemala to help OSI identify the main lines of action to confront the problem strategically. In accordance with the stated objective, from August 17 to 25, 2009, Valérie Sagant, director general of ICPC, assisted by analyst and project officer Esteban BENAVIDES, met with about fifty actors involved in violence prevention in Guatemala.

The list of persons interviewed is included in appendix. We have chosen not to cite them individually. Certain phrases or expressions in this report are reproduced as citations, but without mentioning the author, only to illustrate our analysis.

This report for Open Society Institute presents the main conclusions of the mission, and emphasizes the following:

- Elements that could reinforce the actions of OSI and Fundación Soros–Guatemala in the field of violence prevention;
- Identification of actors who are well-positioned to pilot actions; and
- Coordination methods that are considered pertinent.

This report, like the interviews that were conducted, does not aim to describe the situation and the causes of violence in the country, but aims rather to propose courses of action for defining the future violence prevention strategies of OSI and Fundación Soros–Guatemala. These suggestions do not rest on in-depth knowledge of Guatemala, which ICPC does not have; they are based on analysis of the interviews conducted and on available documents about the Guatemalan situation from the viewpoint of foreign experiences in violence prevention.

These analyses are also based on a vision of prevention that is specific to ICPC. Despite the diversity of contexts, we observe that “comprehensive”,¹ “partnership”,² and locally-based³ approaches are the most effective. Many examples of such prevention strategies are analyzed and disseminated in ICPC publications and through events organized by the Centre.⁴ ICPC also primarily uses the definitions set forth by the United Nations for the various terminology used in this field.⁵ Crime prevention can therefore be understood

¹ A plurality of approaches to violence: criminal, but also social, public health, educational, etc.

² Meaning those that equally mobilize institutional actors (government, police, judicial system) and civil society, most often through NGOs, the private sector, media, etc.

³ Prevention policies implemented by local authorities, usually by municipalities, but supported by national public policy.

⁴ Notably: ICPC, *International Report on Crime Prevention and Community Safety: Trends and Perspectives 2008*, and the accompanying compendium of prevention practices, both available on the website www.crime-prevention-intl.org.

⁵ The aforementioned 2008 International Report includes a glossary in appendix.

in its global and multi-disciplinary sense, and encompasses “...strategies and measures that seek to reduce the risk of crimes occurring, and their potential harmful effects on individuals and society, including fear of crime, by intervening to influence their multiple causes.”⁶ Prevention is therefore examined at different stages: primary prevention, or prevention for the general population; secondary prevention, that is, prevention based on risk factors and “at-risk” populations; and tertiary prevention, meaning prevention of recidivism and focus on rehabilitation. Therefore, the goal of this analysis was to **identify existing resources for eradicating violence through prevention, by mobilizing a plurality of actors, and by fostering community participation.**⁷ This report and its conclusions were presented and discussed with Open Society Institute and Soros Foundation Guatemala on October 12th 2009. The report was also presented to the actors that participated to the Assessment on October 13th.

The resources available for accomplishing the mission and preparing this report required that we examine mainly the issues linked to **preventing violence that could constitute a criminal offence.** We refer to the World Health Organization’s⁸ definition of violence, which includes all types of violence—physical, psychological, moral, etc.—whether such violence is directed toward others or self-inflicted (suicide and self-mutilation). For the purpose of this report, only violence committed toward others and constituting a criminal offence is examined. All types of illegal violence are included, regardless of the perpetrators, including acts of violence committed by law enforcement agents.

Safety issues related to road vehicles were not examined. Although these can be criminal offences, they are not defined as violence because, except in a few cases, they rarely present an element of intention. Pedestrians, who have few safe spaces, as well as drivers, live with an apparently high level of insecurity, but such incidents were not spontaneously mentioned by our interviewees. Yet, deteriorating road safety is frequently referred to in surveys as one of the major sources of insecurity, and many municipalities worldwide have made road safety an important focus of their prevention strategies. To cite but one example, the city of Bogotá, Colombia, created a vast network of bicycle paths and encouraged bicycling as a means of reducing people’s insecurity and appropriating urban spaces.

This report has other important limitations. The mission itself stayed within the territory of the department of Guatemala, and analysis of problems and achievements of other departments, particularly of rural areas, is absent. Also, alternative modes of conflict resolution and other prevention measures, as well as the traditional justice of different indigenous peoples, could not be specifically examined.

⁶ United Nations guidelines for crime prevention, adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2002/13 of 24 July 2002.

⁷ The term “community” is used here in the sense of the “collective” population, the residents of a neighbourhood or district, and unless otherwise specified, has no reference to a religious or cultural community.

⁸ “The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.” World Health Organization (WHO), *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva, 2002.

Issues related to the development of private security, particularly armed guard services for businesses and homes, the development of gated and monitored communities, and increasing private individual protection also could not be analyzed.

Finally, certain actors could not be interviewed due to time constraints and our desire to privilege preventive and joint (partnership) approaches. The role of the judicial system, the police, and the army have been broached, but without having had direct discussions with their representatives.

A certain number of scientific publications and international organizations helped articulate the context of violence in Guatemala. They are named in the significant preparation undertaken by Patricia González Chàvez of the Fundación Soros–Guatemala (attached).

This report will therefore not revisit in detail the description of violence in Guatemala. Instead, it will **present directions for OSI and FSG by privileging those actions with the greatest added value with respect to the many existing cooperative efforts. These suggestions target the utmost realism possible, and are therefore not presented as “ideal strategies”, but rather orientations that appear to us as immediately conceivable based on the presence of actors and resources. Insofar as the human and monetary resources, the schedule, and the terms of such a project are as yet unspecified, the directions proposed remain areas of focus and are not “turnkey” measures, which would require further elaboration, discussion, and involvement by persons who are in charge locally.** Our analysis pursues a threefold development, examining violence prevention issues in Guatemala, proposed actions, and suggested work methods.

1. ISSUES IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN THE GUATEMALAN CONTEXT

In a country where homicides have increased steadily over the past decade,⁹ and at the end of a cruel and bloody conflict, violence prevention as a public policy and action strategy can seem extravagant or utopian. Yet, similar initiatives have been crowning successes in such difficult, albeit different contexts, as certain places in Colombia or Brazil. Moreover, exclusive and harsh repressive policies, like those developed in El Salvador (*mano dura* and *mano super dura*), have demonstrated limitations and are today being questioned. Even if it were completely reliable and honest, the criminal justice system alone cannot resolve violence. We also must hope that it can continue to process an ever-increasing flood of crimes while it also trains its professionals—criminal investigators, prosecutors, and judges—and creates and maintains a decent penitentiary system. Finally and most important, prevention in conjunction with pertinent and measured repression reinforces society's ability to settle conflicts peacefully and favours respect of fundamental rights.

We observed that among the actors interviewed, prevention was positively regarded in preventing violence in Guatemala. However, the current context presents four major challenges.

1.1. Ideas that are imprecise or cause confusion

The “culture of violence”

Violence is presented as an “integral part of Guatemalan culture”, deeply rooted in society and in its imaginary since Spanish colonization; it has destroyed the equilibrium of certain indigenous groups and has erected deep social and territorial inequities which fuels this violence further. Violence in Guatemala “has 450 years of history” and the 1996 peace agreements did terminate this violence according to our contacts. Violence committed during the armed conflict, more than 90% by national law enforcement according to results of the REHMI report, is still very present in society.

Violence also produces a **culture of fear** not only because it reaches high levels, but also because of the impunity awarded to the perpetrators. Doing away with **impunity** also comes within the scope of acts committed during the armed conflict—the search for

⁹ 48 per 100,000 population according to the most recent survey and more than 100 per 100,000 population for Ciudad Guatemala. Guatemala's Civil National Police identified 2655 homicides in 1999; 2904 in 2000; 3230 in 2001; 3631 in 2002; 4237 in 2003; 4507 in 2004; 5338 in 2005; 5885 in 2006; 5781 in 2007; and 6292 in 2008. According to data at INACIF (*Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses*), the average number of violent homicides was 18.85 per day.

perpetrators who ordered or committed the massacres and human rights violations, the “historical” trial of Myrna Mack assassins—but also the events resulting from the conflict, like the symbolic assassination of Monsignor Gerardi. These two “cases” continue to expose the tenacious obstacles to finding truth and the inherent risks for persons who work in this field. However, it should be noted that impunity also concerns other acts of violence, for example the murders of bus drivers, women, or youths in working-class neighbourhoods. **Impunity is largely identified as society’s major problem and the most flagrant sign of dysfunctional institutions.** Only the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) is spared critique and named as the only reliable and efficient institution, but the scope of its activities is limited and its continued action has been the subject of bitter debates and negotiations.

Without analyzing the multiple causes and dynamics of persisting violence, this situation seems to inhibit society. The depiction of violence is crippling. Some actors underscore the sometimes religious fatalism with which the population views violence and corruption in all sectors of society.¹⁰ **Media** are frequently accused of rendering accounts of violence that privilege sensationalism, often by dehumanizing victims in ways that strip them of any dignity.

Finally, the population is very heavily **armed**, and this is often presented as one of the major causes of violence.¹¹ The licit marketplace and illegal weapons trafficking, especially of all calibres of firearms, are the starting point of this proliferation.

The diversity of violence

This overly generalist vision, which is often reduced to the homicide rate, does not explain the extreme range in types of violence and locations, **a fact that must be addressed before contemplating any prevention initiative.** Even if data is not available, it is clear that levels of violence differ greatly between urban and rural zones, or between different cities and villages near isolated border zones where there is significant activity linked to drug trafficking or other types of trafficking and illegal trades.

Many forms of violence are spoken of as severe and repeated, like murder of women, intrafamilial violence, extortion, “dispute settlements” between rival gangs, trafficking in persons, drug trafficking, etc. The causes and underlying sources of violence also vary and are sometimes confusing or ambiguous, like violence against indigenous populations when social or environmental conflicts emerge, or “extralegal executions” and lynching, or events linked to organized crime, and of course threats, intimidation, and attacks committed to impede the search for, and sentencing of, those responsible for so-called “politically-motivated” crimes.

Insufficient data

¹⁰ Ranging from the overwhelming corruption which exists across all public institutions and extending to fiscal fraud which appears generalized, to the “resourceful” behaviour of individuals (*niños listos*) which garners praise.

¹¹ According to a study by Center for the Study of Guatemala (CSG), 85% of homicides are committed with firearms.

The body of information concerning these acts of violence is acutely deficient: victimization surveys are random events, official statistics are still very fragmented, and few, if any, crimes are solved¹² so cause cannot be established. Efforts have been made by the United Nations Development Programme¹³ (UNDP), and associations like IEPADES, in connection with the National Statistics Institute, in order to better record.

In addition to producing very few data on a regularly basis, they also do not appear to be analyzed and cross-referenced with other data sources, such as hospitals, schools, or victims' associations. Intelligence is perceived to be highly deficient, not allowing for legitimate analyses of criminal activities. The army's influence in this regard, and the ways in which it might have used information collected about individuals and Guatemalan society, still weighs heavily on Guatemalan society.

Concepts that need clarification in a Guatemalan context

Notions about a community approach, about community commitment to preventive action, or the role of police in the community, these are often understood with reference to the *juntas locales de seguridad* and to the historically ultra-repressive, indeed illegal, role of certain law enforcement services. "Partnership" between the population and the police, or the army when it is in charge of public safety issues, recalls rights violations, denunciations, "extra-judicial" executions, and still today conjures a deep mistrust, even fear of this issue. Whatever is the exact role of the *juntas locales* and law enforcement, **this state of suspicion and indeed of real risks incurred by local actors must be taken into account in all cooperative action.** Unlike what could be contemplated in other countries, strengthening ties between the police and the population cannot be addressed merely by the development of community police.

1.2. A weak culture of prevention and a quasi non existent public policy

A dominant culture of repression

The idea of public safety among our interviewees is still dominated by a repressive history throughout which the army had the most important role, and a notion of safety that struggles to fully integrate respect of fundamental rights. Beyond this historic national context, Guatemala today is accessory to an international, or "hemispheric", safety agenda that still reinforces exclusively punitive approaches. The "war on drugs" and more recently the Mérida¹⁴ Initiative have left little room for policies of prevention,

¹² According to CICIG estimate, only 2% of reported offences lead to legal recourse.

¹³ Programa de Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, *El costo económico de la violencia en Guatemala*, Guatemala 2006, and *Informe estadístico de la violencia en Guatemala*, Guatemala 2007.

¹⁴ The MERIDA initiative foresees a budget of US\$1.6 billion for a programme that includes the following components: drug trafficking, anti-terrorism and border security, public safety and law enforcement, institutional reinforcement, and rule of law. Prevention actions focus on street gangs.

rehabilitation, or victims' assistance. Moreover, these actions appear to reinforce a very police-oriented, indeed military, national vision of crime fighting.

Paradoxically, from the viewpoint of a very painful recent history, and in the face of increasing numbers of homicides, institutional corruption, and a high level of impunity, public opinion would largely favour repressive, indeed illegal measures such as *limpieza social* (social cleansing)—the murder of persons suspected of a crime without recourse to the criminal justice system.

No tangible public prevention policy, despite recent efforts

To this day, no public policy is fully dedicated to violence or crime prevention. A National Security Council (***Consejo Nacional de Seguridad***), created in April 2008, deals with all safety issues: information, domestic security, external security, and civil defence. The agreement adopted on April 15, 2009, ***Acuerdo Nacional para el Avance de la Seguridad y la Justicia***, contains 101 measures including a few prevention initiatives, but focuses on the operations of policing and justice institutions.¹⁵ Anticipated actions include:

- In the “Institutional Reinforcement” component: the definition and implementation of crime prevention plans at different territorial levels, the implementation of sustainable development pilot projects in more critical zones, the creation of help centres for children, adolescents, and young offenders or those at risk; and
- In the “Social Participation” component: the agreement allows for the development of awareness campaigns against violence, drugs, and alcohol.

A community prevention unit, ***Unidad de prevención comunitaria de la violencia*** (UPCV), was recently created within the *Ministerio de la Gobernación* and a crime prevention branch of *Dirección de prevención del delito* of the *Police Nationale Civile*, subject to the same ministry. Furthermore, the *Vice-ministerio de Apoyo Comunitario* (VAC) is in charge of encouraging an acceptance of violence prevention through a “rapprochement” between police and the community in the form of the *Juntas locales de seguridad* (JLS), composed of locally-based patrol units.¹⁶ Despite the impetus and coordination of these structures, a cross-disciplinary analysis of safety issues and the responses that are needed still appears embryonic.

The National Security Council brings together ministers in charge of the interior (*Gobernación*), of defence, and of foreign affairs, but not those responsible for health or education. At the local level, recent initiatives led to the creation of **safety commissions**

¹⁵ The agreement includes the following: “*Políticas e institucionalidad para la seguridad*”, “*refroma policial*”, “*sistema penitenciario*”, “*políticas e institucionalidad para la investigación criminal y contra la impunidad*”, “*administración de justicia*”, “*control de armas*”, “*empresas y servicios suplementarios de seguridad*”, “*comunicación y participación social*”, “*agenda legislativa*” and “*compromisos de acciones en conjunto de los signatorios del acuerdo*”.

¹⁶ The agreement includes the following: “*Políticas e institucionalidad para la seguridad*”, “*refroma policial*”, “*sistema penitenciario*”, “*políticas e institucionalidad para la investigación criminal y contra la impunidad*”, “*administración de justicia*”, “*control de armas*”, “*empresas y servicios suplementarios de seguridad*”, “*comunicación y participación social*”, “*agenda legislativa*” and “*compromisos de acciones en conjunto de los signatorios del acuerdo*”.

within development councils.¹⁷ However, the link between prevention policies and urban and social development seems poorly articulated. Besides issues such as street lighting, the totality of field practitioners emphasize availability of public spaces as a priority, as these would allow residents to “leave their houses which, for fear of venturing outdoors, have become prisons”, and come together for a simple distraction.¹⁸

The lack of leadership and clear policy by the national government is strongly criticized by the actors we interviewed. Priorities are insufficiently examined—like the long list of 101 commitments of the National Agreement—and effective implementation of legislative reforms is awaited. Reforms underway in the justice system, among prosecutors and police, are believed to have insufficient political and institutional support. If reforming the way judges are appointed to the bench inspires hope for the integrity of the judicial system, suspicions of corruption and incompetence are still overwhelmingly present.

Weak support from the central government for past local initiatives

Information collected for this mission confirms many local prevention action initiatives have been undertaken in the past. Some received support from international cooperation, like the programme funded by USAID in 15 municipalities from 2003 to 2007. However, lack of support from the national government, isolation, and inadequate institutionalization impaired these different initiatives. In other words, they could never be more than limited programmes, usually implemented at the request of international financial backers, without ever having been “appropriated” by local and national actors.

Despite this context, the question of prevention and safety (linked to criminal offences) is the subject of important publications and numerous debates across many non governmental networks and organizations, as well as within institutions.

1.3. Actors are notably weak and dispersed

Strong activity of civil society

Guatemala has many high quality non governmental organizations working in the field of prevention. Their approaches can differ, or they can complement each other, according to their origins or their history: defence of human rights, protection of aboriginal rights, support for victims, etc. Some organizations have moved towards a culture of mistrust since clashing with public authorities. However, **the positioning of civil society with regard to institutional authorities continues to be a subject of lively debate.**

¹⁷ The *Urban and Rural Development Council* allows for national, regional, departmental, municipal, and community councils dedicated to social development and territorial planning. Together these councils are part of a national network coordinated by the Presidency of the Republic.

¹⁸ This approach cannot be limited to a single “building” action (building stadiums or parks, lighting, etc.), because civil and peaceful usage of certain places must be “re-learned” which requires intervention by referents, mediators, members of the community, etc.

Despite this context and the competition that exists between structures for accessing necessary funding for their respective activities, the presence of this vibrant and credible civil society is a significant asset.

Weak institutions

The weakness of government organizations overall and local authorities was underscored by all practitioners interviewed. It was the focus of debates in the international community whose action is largely aimed at strengthening these institutions. Several elements were cited:

- Corruption concerns all public services—authorities acknowledge this situation, and the current Minister of *Gobernación* has made abolishing police corruption one of his key policy points;
- The lack of professional capacity among public administration executives, particularly in the field of prevention;
- The instability of directors and persons in charge (within 18 months, four incumbents held the position of Minister of *Gobernación*); and
- A structural fiscal problem that undermines all public policy—the tax rate in Guatemala is one of the lowest on the continent, collection is ineffective, and the fiscal reform planned for several years is having trouble making its way to Congress.

Two directions are frequently evoked: the risk of returning to an authoritarian form of government—a risk fuelled by the exasperation expressed through public opinion and the political positioning of certain actors—and the opportunity, notably for narco-traffickers, to substitute the State and take on a role of solidarity, especially in isolated zones.

The commitment of Churches

This mission allowed us to paint an in-depth picture of the violence prevention actions of different Churches. These actions are not easily identified through their publicity. The lack of legibility can also be linked to the competition between traditional and evangelical churches.

Based on our interviews and analyses of documents, the role of Churches—especially the archdiocese in the follow-up to the *Guatemala, Nunca Más* report—seems well established in defending human rights, promoting a culture of peace, and abolishing impunity. With regard to the latter, we note in particular the work of the archdiocese's human rights office concerning the assassination of Juan GERARDI.

Outreach work exists that is intended for vulnerable persons, at-risk youths, convicts or persons leaving prison, but these actions appear to be fragmented. Nevertheless, they have proved essential in some places, for example in penitentiaries, or in neighbourhoods where few organizations intervene.

The private sector

Available information about the commitment of businesses or commercial sector groups is rare. Guatemala's historical context also dominates the attitudes of large corporations, and their representatives do not appear compelled to take on a public and active role in violence prevention. Finally, issues concerning the weapons and private security market were not broached.

On the basis of information we gathered, it appears to us that timely actions are implemented that mostly favour the integration of youths into the labour market.¹⁹ These commitments seem limited and it was not possible for us to identify a broader corporate culture of accountability and social responsibility.

The presence of important international cooperation

International support is as much a matter of bilateral cooperation—which receives funding from the United States, Spain, Canada, and Sweden—as it is a matter of multilateral UN agency programmes, such as UNDP or UNESCO, development banks like the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the European Union. These various lenders are governed by their own specific regulations and priorities, and their actions can sometimes seem scattered. Yet, real coordination efforts are achieved through different committees, brought together either at the level of Ambassadors, of technicians, and sometimes in conjunction with civil society. Coordination also takes place around work groups or thematic steering committees. It seemed to us that lack of coordination did not concern the dissemination or exchange of information, but rather the problem of defining a common vision and strategy. On the other hand, action by the international community, like support for the CICIG, bears fruit when it rests on clear, enduring and consensus-building policy objectives.

Many “usual” criticisms are raised: the complexity of the funding methods and funds management, the need for project managers to adapt to financial backers' bureaucratic framework, the promotion of national “models” or specific agendas, a lack of knowledge about local realities and resources, and projects that are too brief to produce viable outcomes. The major support policy aimed at strengthening institutions (especially the police) was questioned by many interviewees, not with respect to its intended purpose, but with respect to its methods which do not adequately take into account Guatemala's specific situation. Finally, the brevity of funding programmes is denounced for not allowing implementation of long-term actions. Requirements that need to be met for achieving desired outcomes are poorly defined, if they exist at all, and engender numerous discourses about the “millions spent” in this institution or that organization and which produce no visible change. Overall, the international presence is perceived as a guarantor of change—legislative and institutional reforms, financial support.

Finally, we should note that justice and security sectors have been clearly prioritized in the numerous fields of cooperation within the context of the “Antigua Declarations” of May and November 2008, adopted by the government of Guatemala and the “G13” and which brings together the main financial backers. Implementation of *Acuerdo Nacional para el Avance de la Seguridad y Justicia* was identified as priority. Reference to the

¹⁹ Notably, programmes funded by USAID.

Paris Declaration on the efficacy of development aid recalls the principle that backers and aid beneficiaries are mutually responsible, and the respect of stated commitments must be the object of public scrutiny.

These briefly presented issues must be weighed. The country's electoral calendar must also be taken into account, to the extent that safety appears increasingly to be an electoral issue, and where "immediate tangible results", that is to say a steady and significant decrease in the homicide rate, risks diverting energies needed for the sustainable development of prevention policies. However, the current context also has advantages: the idea of "preventive approach" is progressively permeating discourses and programmes. The role of authorities and local actors is no longer totally overshadowed by government ministries. The importance of crime data follow-up, even if only of violent acts, is increasingly acknowledged. All initiatives can be anchored on these strengths.

2. PROMISING AREAS OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The OSI and FSG violence prevention initiative should infuse added value to the body of existing cooperation efforts. This added value should stem from the specific assets of OSI and FSG: a capacity for dialogue with all parts of society (human rights militants and promoters, field practitioners, government officials, entrepreneurs, religious organizations, etc.), and their international reputation which facilitates access to decision-makers.

In the current Guatemalan situation, two main objectives could be privileged:

- **Facilitating democratic control of institutions** in charge of prevention and safety, using technical information tools, dialogue, and follow-up; and
- **Reinforcing civil society's ability to interact with, and be heard by, institutional agencies.**

Both these objectives must assure support for various populations, especially the most vulnerable, and assure that themes and actions readily respond to their needs, and also involve them in implementation and follow-up. In order to maximize the impact of this support, it seems preferable **to work with existing structures and with the aim of truly exerting an influence on their areas of action and their methods by supporting civil society's active participation and evaluation.**

Among the many possible actions, support for local initiatives seems to us a foremost priority. An influential role can be useful at the national level. Finally, we highlight two themes we believe should be the object of continued attention: support for victims and interventions aimed at youths facing the greatest difficulties.

2.1. Support citizen participation in local prevention policies

Work at the local level, most often municipal but also at the level of neighbourhoods, demonstrates that, for those who are most in need, changes are possible within a reasonable amount of time. An advantage of this approach is its adaptability to a variety of contexts, and in the case of Guatemala, it accounts for population diversity and "cultures of prevention", as well as the great disparity in violence problems from one place to another. Moreover, there is growing consensus among central governments and non governmental institutions on the need to develop local policies.

According to the information collected, certain local elected officials in Guatemala would be interested in becoming more involved in this direction, despite their fears about

lacking necessary resources, which can prompt them to bid for police reinforcements or video surveillance materials from central government. Indeed, during our mission, the *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad* brought together the mayors of many cities on the subject of implementing local safety and prevention strategies. **Support for these local strategies also includes raising awareness about violence prevention and community safety, which is broader than police action alone.** Local authorities have resources that can be mobilized in favour of prevention, the same as management and urban development (road system, urban planning regulations when they exist, public health services, water treatment, various equipment, etc.), social services, sporting amenities, etc.

Promote participation at all stages of local policy

Each design, implementation, and evaluation phase of a public policy can integrate strong community participation, even when these various stages are uncoordinated, as often happens. Despite the fact that a strategy can lack method or means, it can nevertheless be pragmatically “invested” by actors of civil society.

The audit stage is often crucial as it defines the needs of populations. Often in the field of prevention, this stage risks being reduced to mere enumeration of police-recorded offences. Though these numbers are necessary, they account for the activity of police services and not for the reality of problems, nor for priority needs. In many countries and in a few cities, this situation is complemented by victimization surveys. These surveys account for realities that are underestimated by police, or that do not sufficiently mobilize police. With regard to intrafamilial violence, these investigation methods are very useful. However, cost often limits their usefulness. Other tools exist that favour community participation in the audit. For example, exploratory walks help to precisely identify the perceptions of neighbourhood residents with regard to dangerous spaces or situations, as well as those elements which residents find reassuring. These analyses favour a more comprehensive approach to prevention by including, for example, urban planning or public transportation elements. In addition, certain cities have developed standard questionnaires intended for professional practitioners in order to systematically collect information from populations with whom they work. This anonymous information allows for tracking the evolution of a group (e.g. evolution of types of consumption among drug dependent persons), for discovering previously unidentified problems (e.g. prostitution in a given neighbourhood), for collecting information that people often refuse to tell authorities (e.g. types of violence, like victims of extortion who fear reprisals). The impact of such a questionnaire depends on the training and consistency of practitioners who administer it. Other surveys, polls, or questionnaires for users when registering for activities can provide important audit information. Finally, mobilizing services that are not directly linked to prevention or safety can also generate essential data, like data from hospitals with regard to intrafamilial violence or “dispute settlements” that are not reported to police, morgues, schools, sporting venues, and other public spaces or public events. In numerous Latin American cities and elsewhere, accomplishing a **local safety audit** has become a common practice.²⁰

²⁰ See ICPC, *Recensement des observatoires de la criminalité* 2009, and the 2008 *International Compendium of Crime Prevention Practices*.

To this day, and to our knowledge, Guatemala does not have initiatives for local victimization surveys.²¹ The UNDP conducted victimization surveys at *Ciudad Guatemala*, IEPADES and ICCPG conducted audits in the capital and in rural areas. CONAPREVI already has a database on questions of violence against women. Plans for a new violence observatory are possibly being discussed with a UN agency. OSI and FSG support could target the **reinforcement of local practitioners for the implementation of different diagnostic tools and their long-term usage.**

The creation of these “data banks”, often called “crime or violence observatories”, can also focus on the **resources mobilized** (many police officers are assigned to this field, also many social services practitioners, case management services, proposed activities, etc.) and facilitate the **follow-up of policy implementation.**²² One of the prevention issues raised in democratic debate obviously concerns the **budget allocated** by government for these actions. These systematically collected data are important, but are often based on poorly documented information.

Data collected often defines actions, though sometimes in a disorganized manner. Community participation at this stage lies in the capacity to impose a **veritable debate on the data collected.** In fact, it is the confrontation, rather than the juxtaposition, of these data that will render a realistic picture of the situation and lead to **a consensus on priorities.** Very often, priorities that are initially identified by police services (e.g. gangs) are later amended after a more exhaustive audit, resting notably on community participation (e.g. intrafamilial violence). Certain types of offences are more difficult for police to identify, and in some cases, there may be a tendency to “over interpret” certain signs as indicators of criminal activity, such as tattoos or choice of clothing. Ongoing confrontation of these viewpoints is generally organized within the framework of **local steering committees**, further underscoring the importance of community participation.

On the basis of information collected, certain places in Guatemala have already set up specific agencies,²³ which are most often safety commissions established within development councils. It appeared to us that representatives of civil society could, at this stage, be confronted with the problem of full participation in debates and DECISIONS made by these agencies. These difficulties can be linked to natural bureaucratic inertia, sometimes to dysfunction, indeed opposition. The initiative of OSI and FSG could **readjust this balance of power** by supporting the activities of the most representative organizations and by fostering their participation in public agencies. When possible, work performed within structures can become a lasting foothold. Furthermore, active participation cultivates a more all-encompassing and integrated vision of prevention, by including elements like urban planning, the creation and design of public spaces, support for victims, community rehabilitation of convicts, to name only a few.

Support for organizations whose actions have the greatest impact on public policies

²¹ For example, the poll conducted by AUTUE with users of public transportation services.

²² There are numerous examples of diagnostic tools and follow-up instruments used for local safety and prevention policies. The aim here is not their exhaustive enumeration, but rather to show the possibility of fast and cost-effective implementation of mechanisms that foster participation.

²³ San Marcos, Sololá, Chiquimula.

We were not able to interview actors in many places outside of the department of Guatemala. We were notified of different municipalities that are involved with NGOs in local prevention strategies, for example in Quetzaltenango. Based on analysis of interviews conducted, it seems that certain organizations already have considerable experience with these issues and approaches.²⁴

These organizations have significant know-how and experience in the field of **local action**: safety audits, local training for practitioners, civil society participation, work already undertaken with mayors, development of manuals, etc. Their **knowledge and research** focuses precisely on prevention, not only on safety issues overall, and can be mobilized in support of local initiatives or for steering local projects. Their exact role cannot be defined a priori and will only be clarified within the framework of the implementation process established by an OSI and FSG programme, but many perspectives can be contemplated:

- Training in the use of diagnostic tools, participation techniques, steering projects, etc.;
- Dissemination of local experiences within the country and promotion of initiatives; and
- Eventual centralization and critical analysis of data collected across different “observatory” sites.

Other organizations work **directly with populations** and their action acknowledges the realities and needs of the most vulnerable groups who are often “forgotten” in the administrative and technical structuring of public policies. Two examples come to mind that will be developed in chapters three and four of this report. On one hand, legal representation²⁵ or criminal defence organizations favour accounting for forgotten interests²⁶ by exercising recourse within the institutional system. Their ability to “play the game of institutions” contributes to a “readjustment of forces at work”.

On the other hand, organizations that intervene on behalf of the most marginalized populations—for example, the residents of isolated or underprivileged neighbourhoods, “at-risk” youths, or persons in rehabilitation—must be integrated in the building and implementation processes of local safety policies. We raised the difficulty of establishing a trusting and production working relationship with public authorities. These difficulties must not exclude these essential actors, and to this end, FSG can have a role of intermediary or guarantor, or at the very least of surveillance.

Finally, it appears to us that all action at the local level should include two additional elements. Considering their impact on the debate and on perceptions, **media** cannot be ignored in the development and follow-up of local prevention policies.²⁷ Organizations that broadcast and disseminate so-called “alternative” information can usefully contribute

²⁴ Such as IEPADES, ICCPG, SEDEM

²⁵ Such as the Guatemalan Association of Mayan Lawyers

²⁶ We do not refer here to the defence of socially, politically, or economically dominant individuals or groups, but rather to methods or legal or judicial support for some vulnerable persons or groups.

²⁷ See notably: *Médias, prévention de la criminalité et sécurité urbaine : analyse succincte de l'influence des médias et pistes de réflexion*, ICPC, 2008

to the strategy described above, at all stages of diagnostic, implementation, and evaluation. Also, it is widely acknowledged²⁸ that the success of local prevention strategies is largely conditioned by the commitment of the mayor. Here, also, the reputation of FSG can be a forceful incentive for **local elected officials** to invest in prevention.

To sum up, the OSI and FSG initiative could support the design and implementation of local prevention strategies in a few selected municipalities and more specifically:

- **Foster the accomplishment and continuity of pluralistic local safety audits by funding “alternative” diagnostic tools, such as victimization surveys, exploratory walks, polls, questionnaires, etc.;**
- **Support organizations that represent the most vulnerable populations so they can have access to, and a voice within steering committees; and**
- **Support organizations capable of reinforcing the capacities of different local actors through training, the creation of guides, manuals, etc.**

2.2. Foster clear orientations and ongoing political commitment at the national level

Since the signing of peace agreements, numerous reforms have been initiated to reinforce the rule of law and abolish crime. Despite these efforts, conceptual analyses of prevention, dedicated action plans, and public policies remain limited. In addition to supporting research and reflection in this field, we believe OSI and FSG can foster plurality in the national debate and exert a helping albeit exacting pressure with regard to action by public authorities in this field.

A pluralistic national debate

Many people interviewed insisted on the need for **changing attitudes** in Guatemala regarding prevention, and regarding expectations with regard to FSG who “should not only accompany project implementation, but also help build citizenship by generating a culture of prevention”.

As we already indicated, prevention is not specifically defined and does not really constitute a priority. Analyses appear to be conducted in a somewhat isolated manner in different circles of government, civil society, and universities. Again, a confrontation of perspectives would accelerate reflection and contribute to building consensus around a

²⁸ This affirmation is based equally on our international experience and on interviews conducted in Guatemala.

culture of prevention that is not necessarily homogeneous. At the national level, debates that bring together key influential actors from these different circles would also help identify priority initiatives and common objectives, with a view to establishing agreement that does not prejudice diverse opinions and analyses.

In this context, **presenting targeted international experiences** can be useful insofar as it opens up possibilities of exchange outside of the national context and the inflexibility which is linked, for example, to political agendas and manoeuvres, organizational culture, etc. As well, timely fact-finding visits or participation in international events can favour the evolution of designs. These types of international exchanges need to be endorsed in the framework of structured efforts at the national level. For example, implementation of *Acuerdo Nacional para el Avance de la Seguridad y la Justicia*, which contains 101 proposals, could be the subject of open debates intended to incite both the government and its partners to identify a limited number of priorities requiring knowledge and expertise from abroad. Productive international exchanges rest on an analysis of specific needs, and can be conducted within the scope debates organized or supported by FSG. Finally, lessons learned from local prevention experiences would invigorate Guatemalan initiatives and demonstrate that “all is possible”.

Finally, based on availability of resources, FSG can also act as a “**focal point**” capable of relaying requests for information or contacts, both within the country itself and internationally, and using existing networks.²⁹ Exchange of information can focus on inspiring practices and policies identified in other cities or countries, existing training programmes, published research or reports, tools and various instruments (manuals, guides, standard designs, etc.).

Rigorous follow-up of government initiatives

The reinforcement of institutions in Guatemala is quasi-unanimously recognized as a necessity. However, support methods are the subject of debate and FSG can take on a role distinct from that of all other financial backers. Instead of direct funding of governmental structures, and as is the case at the local level, support can consist of reinforcing democratic debate, influencing decision-makers, and ensuring follow-up of prior decisions.

Many elements require particular vigilance:

- The comprehensive vision of safety at the governmental level, which seems to be very limited in “law and order” ministries and which fails to integrate non governmental partners in debates;³⁰
- Articulation and coordination between different public prevention policies;³¹ in this regard, the example of CONAPREVI could be taken into account;

²⁹ At the national level, organizations and individuals interviewed; at the international level, a few networks such as ICPC, FLACSO, and CESC take on this role.

³⁰ For example, many countries created extended National Security Councils in ministries responsible for social, education, health, and urban development issues to name only a few, and local elected officials, NGOs, etc.

- Budgetary priorities: if reinforcing the Police Nationale Civile is a viable priority, its “profitability” can be questioned: How can the integrity of newcomers be assured in the current context? How to release the means required for technical training? How to lead national reform when it appears necessary to concentrate assets in a few places?
- Resources allocated for prevention at both the national and local level: to our knowledge, Guatemala has no financial plan in this regard,³² and
- Acknowledgement of the diversity of violent acts and the diversity of conflict resolution methods, in particular, among indigenous populations.

Through **ongoing dialogue with public authorities**, as well as support for organizations who can promote these different approaches, FSG could also foster long-term follow-up.

To sum up, the OSI and FSG initiative could usefully create a kind of “hub of violence prevention” at the national level that would in turn organize:

- **National seminars;**
- **International exchanges and targeted fact-finding visits abroad;**
- **Studies; and**
- **High-level dialogue with Guatemalan leaders in charge of reform regarding prevention approaches to be prioritized in Guatemala (pluralistic approach, local, recognition of indigenous peoples’ realities, institutional coordination, allocation of necessary budgetary resources, etc.).**

This work would also be informed by the outcomes of local initiatives, which would also benefit from national and international reflection.

At both the local and national level, two issues appear to need greater attention.

³¹ For example, the mental health programme in Guatemala’s Ministry of Health appears to respond to essential needs for victims of violence, but the Ministry appears to not be taken into account in national reflection.

³² Some countries have imagined, albeit in a limited manner, mechanisms that allow for automatically allocating a portion of fiscal revenues to prevention programmes or victims’ assistance programmes. For example: allocation of goods seized in criminal investigations, insurances deductions, etc.

2.3. Abolish impunity by supporting victims and systematically documenting acts of violence

Doing away with impunity is an absolute priority in Guatemala that can be approached in different ways. For the most part, national authorities and the international community emphasize strengthening the capacities of police in charge of criminal investigations, prosecutors, and judges, because no offender can be identified, charged, and sentenced if these authorities are powerless and ineffective. Impunity and its consequences on society (notably, fear, atomisation, and intolerance) can also be challenged by empowering victims in many ways:

- By reinforcing their capacity for legal recourse, individually or collectively;
- By reinforcing their capacity to report acts of violence, and acknowledgement of victimization; and
- By reinforcing their capacity to mobilize community and government solidarity.

Actions with regard to institutions

Issues related to the disclosure of violent incidents have already been raised, and what we propose here is not connected to setting up anonymous phone numbers whose effectiveness depends largely on the quality and integrity of police services. Despite the dangers incurred and the multiple procedural obstacles, legal recourse remains symbolic of individuals' and society's capacity to impose respect for their rights, as demonstrated by the ongoing courageous actions of the Myrna Mack Foundation or the human rights office of the archdiocese, among others.

Other organizations also intervene to **introduce legal recourse and provide legal support for individuals or groups** in their procedures with institutions. Access to justice rests in great part on the possibility of receiving guidance on how to navigate through the administrative and legal maze. Such actions help to **update institutional dysfunction**, identify little-known or unrecognized problems, and enhance solidarity.

Support for these organizations is important, but severing their isolation is particularly crucial. What is required of public authorities in the area of criminal justice is primarily the political will to enact fundamental reform and to follow through on subsequent implementation. This requirement can also rest on specific actions, in precise cases that exert pressure on the daily functioning of police services and the justice system, and which have a direct impact on individuals and society. The strength these types of actions is often proportional to the collective and national visibility they are afforded. These actions also buttress government initiatives designed for victims, like those recently adopted in Guatemala within the framework of the *redes de derivacion*, and which is recognized by the Public Ministry, the *Instituto de Defensa Publica Penal*, the police, and the ministries of health and education.

Systematic data collection

We earlier underscored the difficulty of precisely establishing the circumstances and motives of numerous violent offences because of the low reporting rate. Documenting

these offences helps the criminal investigation, but also provides support for victims and raises awareness of the “dynamics” of violence. The remarkable work accomplished in this regard by REMHI, which systematically collects the testimonies of oppressed populations and works to establish historical truth, to restore victims’ dignity, and identify future actions. Failing the promotion of documentation work at this level, then more timely and directed initiatives in this regard could be encouraged.

Serious offences such as the assassinations of women, the murders of bus drivers in the capital city, the deaths of youths suspected of being gang members, and countless other acts of violence committed in rural areas remain largely unexplained. Suspicions and speculations exist but lack precision. A systematic, rather than nominative analysis would help to pinpoint the areas of greatest leverage. Currently, an offence attributed to “organized crime” leaves no possibility for imagining a reasonable or credible initiative. Without substituting an investigation, identifying the circumstances and analyzing facts in detail can nevertheless restore actors’ capacities. For example, analysis can establish a link between victims that helps reduce risk. Systematic study by CERIGUA of how the murders of women are treated in newspapers has contributed to raising the media’s awareness about the lack of dignity for victims in processing the information. Prison violence is also not well understood and systematic documentation techniques could be established without endangering the safety of witnesses insofar as the objective would be to identify protections that could or should be provided by institutions.

Implementation of these types of actions in Guatemala represents a huge challenge considering institutional impairment. However, some initiatives already exist that would benefit from being networked and valued, indeed extended and simplified. The role of FSG in such a process could be even more beneficial as it would encourage cooperation with governmental structures in charge of developing victim assistance mechanisms as well as ways of documenting violent acts. University research centres are obviously ideally suited for this field of action.

To sum up, support could be more systematically provided for actors who:

- **Encourage record-keeping and analysis of information concerning violence; and**
- **Provide legal and judicial support for the most vulnerable victims.**

FSG can have a determinant role in the transmittal and validation of information and analyses which are often stifled (functioning as a “hub”), as well as implementation within the framework of local initiatives.

2.4. Develop interventions for youths who have the greatest difficulties

Guatemala's population is young³³ and young people make up the majority of victims of violence as well as most of the offenders who are identified. The importance of initiatives that target youths was raised by many actors interviewed, and further emphasizes the need to create a culture of peace and "changes in attitudes".

Helping youths who face the greatest problems

Education, both in the family and in schools, is broadly acknowledged, internationally and in Guatemala, as a fundamental element of protection. Of all the factors that characterize child development, emotional environment is generally considered to be the most determinant. During our interviews, the role of fathers was raised numerous times, particularly as regards the responsibility of men "who have children left and right but do not care for them". Also, the emigration of many parents to the United States deprives children of their family environment. Affective deprivation among unwanted children and those who receive little or no guidance during childhood and adolescence is frequently identified as an important risk factor—increased risk of involvement in violent criminal activity and increased risk of victimization, particularly resulting from low self-esteem. The paths taken by young victims of violence and young offenders confirms with the widely documented findings of practitioners' analyses. Therefore, certain countries emphasize access to education for everyone and early prevention, for example, through programmes that endorse post-natal visits. Though these measures appear essential, we do not believe they can be the action core of FSG considering the magnitude of required investments,³⁴ but also because attention must be directed toward youths who presently encounter significant problems and who fuel the climate of violence also responsible for their victimization.

This support can depend on more "generous" mechanisms. For example, Guatemala's *escuelas abiertas* programme is open to all youths and is mainly frequented by those under the age of 16 years. The participation of youths who are less well integrated in this type of programme can be encouraged through cooperation with more specialized associations like CEIBA or APREDE.

Facilitating the work of practitioners

The term "frontline" practitioners is often used to describe workers in direct contact with the most vulnerable populations—the homeless, drug addicts, alcoholics, violent offenders, convicts leaving prison, disenfranchised persons. Reaching this "clientele" happens more through streetwork than within the framework of predetermined spaces. Maintaining contact, establishing trust, directing toward agencies that help and rehabilitate, and providing long-term stability are all issues in frontline work and the reasons why the actions of practitioners' often enter into tense situations with the police, and with more "conventional" social actors.

Their role is crucial as it often prevents a complete rupture between different parts of society and they constitute the only actors capable of directly meeting the most isolated

³³ 28% of the population has between 15 and 29 years (Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – UN-ECLAC, 2008).

³⁴ Schooling is mandatory, but over-crowding in classrooms and dilapidated conditions are often emphasized.

persons. Such work experiences, which we were able to discover during our mission, were conducted either by NGOs like CEIBA and APREDE, or by evangelical churches working in neighbourhoods or prisons.

These practitioners are sometimes fragile in connection to the demands of their mission or their personal experiences. Here also, FSG could help build bridges so to speak between different types of actors in order to enhance understanding of work with troubled youths, and also provide assistance with professionalization programmes. Recognition by the government and by other partners for the importance of this role would contribute to perpetuating certain actions.

Promoting public policy and rehabilitation

Government programmes and international cooperation seem to have abandoned social work in prisons, rehabilitation, developing alternatives to incarceration, and post-sentencing follow-up. Too often, discourses on this topic are fatalistic in the face of the magnitude of the task at hand: “it would be necessary to rebuild all prisons”, “organized crime has taken control of establishments”, “how to rehabilitate convicts when there is labour shortage”, etc.

It is clear that no cooperation can hope to correct this issue, which is riddled with complexities linked to all the aforementioned elements, and among which impunity, corruption, development of organised criminal activity are heightened in a closed prison environment. Initiatives, for example with the support of USAID, aimed at erasing tattoos that stigmatize persons like “gang members” and make their professional rehabilitation difficult is certainly a concrete and useful response.³⁵ However, such attempts at professional rehabilitation by private agencies have encountered certain difficulties.

Though it is not the responsibility of FSG to engage in similar actions, concern regarding rehabilitation could take other forms, for example:

- Through local prevention strategies: in keeping with the resources and motivations of actors from different municipalities, simple programmes with demonstrated effectiveness can be supported, such as legal measures providing alternatives to incarceration (community work, reparations, etc.), rehabilitation efforts that mobilize actors in education, or cooperative work with the mental health sector for example; and
- Through national mobilization: the theme of rehabilitation and concrete action possibilities could be broadly promoted within the framework of debates organized or supported by FSG.

To sum up, FSG could help illuminate the “forgotten of prevention”, those who are most marginalized in society, prisoners, persons who are very unstable, etc. Action can be developed in different directions:

³⁵ Tattoo removal programmes are also developed in El Salvador.

- **Support for organizations that have direct contact with these individuals;**
- **Promotion of local initiatives that mobilize municipal resources (e.g. social assistance, integration through sports, etc.), and the private sector (employment, training); and**
- **Integration of rehabilitation as a theme in national prevention and safety debates.**

These different proposals should not be studied separately—actions can intersect and mutually empower and strengthen one another. They can also fuel other initiatives, for example, collection, analysis and compilation of information can support and improve on attempts to create a national violence observatory. The success of a new OSI and FSG initiative or impetus in the field of violence prevention also rests largely on the methodology used in development, implementation, and follow-up.

3. SUGGESTED WORK METHODS

The relevance of the OSI and FSG intervention in Guatemala could be assessed in terms of its **capacity to generate changes that are real and apparent for the population**, within a geographically or thematically scaled-down framework. To this end, we suggest certain modes of work and organization.

3.1. Follow-up of local projects through action-evaluation

Objectives

The purpose of the “action evaluation” as we understand it is different from the evaluation that gives financial backers an account of how funding is used or to verify that administrative procedures are followed. The “action evaluation” also does not measure programme outcomes subsequent to implementation, but rather ensures a **follow-up and a retro-action throughout project implementation**. The purpose of the “action evaluation” is to support actors in charge of programme implementation, to correct weak elements along the way, and to contextually assess the value of results. The action evaluation is rigorous and demanding, but also benevolent and intended to move projects and project owners forward.

This “frees” persons in charge of programme implementation from a workload which they often do not have time to exercise. It avoids having to use to predesigned evaluations designed for monitoring how funds are used, and instead it creates a body of detailed and useful information for other local experiences and for national programmes.

Methods

Assuming a programme is intended for several locations (5 to 8), the action evaluation would require appointing at least one person on a full-time basis who is qualified in evaluation techniques and who possesses in-depth knowledge of local violence prevention strategies.

The evaluation plan to be established in agreement with local partners would include:

- A compendium of information regarding the project process: for example, meetings of safety commissions, participating members, allocated budgets, etc.;
- A qualitative analysis of coordinating and steering activity; and
- Designing outcome indicators that refer, for example, to the quality and types of citizen participation in local decision-making, to the effectiveness of measures implemented, etc. These indicators can be designed on the basis of existing instruments, but would be adapted to local context and resources.

The evaluator is responsible for presenting analyses and conclusions, at regular intervals (e.g. once a month, or every two months), in order to foresee adjustments either of the programme or of indicators! Analysis focuses on changes generated and on programme improvements. Reports for the financial backer and manager must be distanced further apart and propose ways of improving the project. This evaluation reinforces the project throughout its evolution, and failing some major obstacle, project duration and funding must be confirmed and stable.

The evaluator can also create partnerships, for example with universities, in order to strengthen analysis capacities. The evaluator can seek out information about other local experiences and international examples. One of the elements that contribute to the success of such a project is the capacity to raise awareness about positive outcomes. It is therefore important for the evaluator to have strategic positioning and support, most notably with regard to decision-makers.

Finally, this type of evaluation can help raise awareness and knowledge of fieldwork, rather than simply applying the “top-tier” decisions about programmes. Identifying local know-how and abilities plays an essential role in **fostering creativity and innovation**.

3.2. Influence and vigilance at the national level

Objectives

As we mentioned in preceding sections, objectives in this field are:

- Readjustment of the balance of powers between government authorities and civil society, central and local governments, and help for indigenous peoples and the most vulnerable groups;
- Promotion of prevention approaches, building a culture of prevention by developing “safety paradigms”; and
- Surveillance with regard to the evolution and implementation of public policies.

This role represents a responsibility for OSI and FSG with regard to the “partners” that are mobilized within the framework of these programmes.

Methods

Three modes of action could be privileged. **Organizing debates, seminars, and targeted meetings** has been suggested and already successfully accomplished by FSG.³⁶ These could be organized in the context of more specific violence prevention ideas. Along the same line, publishing research studies and conference proceedings also contributes to building knowledge and a culture of prevention.

Top-tier discussions could be developed with government representatives— Presidency of the Republic, ministers, senior administrative and judicial officers, as well as a local elected officials, members of Congress, etc. Such discussions, like those performed by Ambassadors, help to directly identify the institutional priorities of these different agencies, as well as promote and express interest in public policy, identify dysfunction, and promote prevention designs and ideas. If OSI and FSG do not possess the institutional base of a UN organization or a government, they nevertheless possess ample legitimacy to drive “influential work”.

Finally, defining a **communication strategy** that supports any programme is imperative. This strategy is necessary for supporting all facets of action:

- Raise awareness of, and spread knowledge about frontline realities experienced across the country and “make lived experiences a matter of public record”;
- Create opportunities for debates that move prevention forward; and
- Value effective practices and demonstrate the benefits of preventive approaches.

Looking at the communication actions of militant non governmental organizations that have demonstrated know-how in the field can be useful, but the strategy proposed here aims to influence, promote, and protect rather than denounce. **An important part of outcomes depends on actions, and these require more in-depth reflection and analysis which could be developed during the next developmental phases of the OSI and FSG initiative.**

For these three action methods, timely interventions should be contemplated at all levels of organization: project officer, programme manager, Guatemala official, Washington official, etc.

³⁶ See notably the most recent *Seminario Internacional : Enfoque Sistémico de la Política nacional de Seguridad en Guatemala*, Ciudad Guatemala, July 7-8, 2009

3.3. An opportunistic approach to coordination between donors

Objectives

Coordination between donors within the same organization is complex and subject to a number of political and strategic imperatives that are inherently linked to cooperation. It would be irrelevant to hope that differing agendas could be met by a single project, and imagining this as the starting point of an OSI and FSG programme would risk arousing numerous energies for discussions exclusively about the “format” of cooperative action (duration, funding methods, management, task-sharing among backers, etc.). A frequently cited criticism aimed at international cooperation, in Guatemala and elsewhere, is precisely that the time and energy devoted to defining a project is disproportionate to the energy dedicated to implementation.

Instead of imagining a vast “programme framework” around violence prevention that brings together many donors, a careful study of their policies and in-depth discussion with each backer would increase the chances for seizing existing opportunities and strengthening similar programme objectives.

Discussions that focus on agreed upon actions, instead of focussing on the usual countless projects or ideas to be developed, **generate a debate that centres more on content**. Sharing specific knowledge with donors about violence and successful initiatives undoubtedly enhances coordination of actions, which can also be developed according to each participant’s schedule and constraints.

Promoting a culture of prevention that rests on **comparative analyses** contributes to building bridges with other OSI initiatives around media, governance, or youths. These parallel goals do not need to be researched a priori, but belong to the framework of specific actions implemented. The same applies to donors.

Methods

At the national level, coordination between financial backers is the subject of much attention and numerous procedures which FSG must identify for the benefit of participation and timely intervention. Accordingly, individual contacts can sometimes be privileged. Maintaining up-to-date knowledge about cooperations or projects requires continual work and permanent contacts. Presenting FSG initiatives to financial backers commands their attention, promotes FSG actions, and helps identify converging points of interest.

At the local level, knowledge about projects is generally more fluent and sharing of means or project harmonization can be accomplished within the framework of coordinating structures.

3.4. Follow-up and internal organization

According to our understanding and knowledge of OSI and FSG objectives, the present mission is intended to fuel reflection in view of defining and implementing a large-scale

violence prevention project in Guatemala. We have considered the hypothesis of a **multi-year plan of at least five years**; less than five years appears to us incompatible with hoped-for outcomes. In this context, certain elements of internal organization can be highlighted, though any detailed consideration would be premature.

Objectives

Internal organization must:

- Contribute to developing a project adapted to local issues and resources, and respond to, or help identify the needs of populations, notably those most vulnerable;
- Follow-up and review the project in order to obtain conclusive outcomes;
- Guarantee that actions which bear fruit will be strengthened; and
- Disseminate the lessons learned from this project.

Methods

The development and launch of the project should mobilize a **large circle of partners** in order to respond to participation demands and the publicity required for this type of project. Partners include any person or entity that can play a role in violence prevention in Guatemala, at both the national and local level. Their specific involvement in project implementation will be unequal, but their mobilization and consultation is indispensable.

We believe a **project director** within FSG and OSI should be appointed prior to coordination with partners. The project director would be responsible for prompting reflection about project actions and phases. Concomitantly, an **evaluator-actor** should also be named.

The **choice of intervention sites** for local action can take inspiration from different criteria, for example from programmes already supported by FSG, but it would also be appropriate to privilege sites (among those communities facing the most serious problems) that have solid resources (personnel, number of NGOs, etc.) and existing political commitments in order to demonstrate that change is possible.

Also, a **committee** in charge of debating overall strategy could be established, that could include well-known people and personalities, national and international, chosen on an individual basis for their creative ability and their knowledge, and who should ensure a plurality of viewpoints.

Diversity within the committee would reinforce OSI and FSG capacities in the following areas:

- Vigilance and surveillance;
- Multi-disciplinary and joint approaches; and
- Dissemination and influence.

This committee should involve members on a personal level, and should set itself apart from others that work with FSG.

As previously indicated, **support for specialized international or regional networks** could usefully contribute to debates about prevention designs, about worldwide

awareness, and regional prevention, and also provide specialized technical assistance (information sessions, assistance with setting up tools and instruments, professional reinforcement, etc.) for previously identified subjects.

These various suggestions remain fragmented a this stage and cannot be further specified outside the framework of exchanges with sponsors. However, they emphasize the importance of process for achieving project success.

CONCLUSION

One of the major problems in Guatemala is the deep mistrust of institutions, which is explained not only historically but, unfortunately, also in current events. Democratic culture has no concrete footing and the country's "elites" do not seem mobilized around this objective. With the exception of CICIG, the international community, which is very present, would not always have high expectations regarding outcomes with allotted funds. The worksite of violence prevention seems gigantic considering the work needed to advance the "imaginary" of Guatemalans on the subject of violence, and to establish and concretely implement still undeveloped public policies.

In this context, OSI and FSG possess solid assets. Violence prevention could be built on the acknowledgement that **violence impedes the development and progress of society and individuals**. It restricts human, social, and economic development. Violence feeds society's most reactionary elements, paralyzes the population, and prevents it from organization and action. "Resolving the problem of violence in Guatemala" is not foreseeable. However, timely and conclusive advancements are possible that circumvent fatalistic perceptions and contribute, step by step, to creating a culture of peace.

APPENDIXES