



**GLOBAL
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AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES

Responding to the impact
of urban drug markets

WALTER KEMP

JULY 2020



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study draws on inputs from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's various projects, experts, and networks. In particular, it is based on data, interviews, and information collected by Inge Helena Lilia Valencia Peña, Tariq Khosa, Jameel Junejo, Rukshana Parker, David Danelo and Juan Albarracín Dierolf who shared their time and insights with us during the research and writing. We would like to thank them for their valuable contributions and their constructive engagement throughout the process. Special thanks also to Mark Shaw, Kristina Amerhauser, Ruggero Scaturro and the Global Initiative's publications team.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development (GPDPD) implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). We would like to thank our partners in GIZ who steered us substantively through the report. The contents, however, are the sole responsibility of The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and do not necessarily reflect the views of GIZ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Walter Kemp is Senior Fellow at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and directs the Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe. Previously he was held a number of senior positions in the Organization for Security and Cooperation and Cooperation in Europe, was vice president of the International Peace Institute, and spokesman and speechwriter at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. He has written extensively on conflict prevention, the relationship between crime and conflict, as well as European security issues.

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Cartography: Paulina Rosol-Barrass
Illustration: Nina Simone Wilsmann, Claudio Landi, Paulina Rosol-Barrass

Please direct inquiries to:
The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland

www.globalinitiative.net

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



There are no simple solutions to dealing with the complexity of urban drug markets. Therefore, it is necessary to bring together a wide variety of expertise from various backgrounds to compare and learn from different experiences and approaches. This report is inspired by the desire to break down silos between experts working on alternative development, urban security, drugs and crime in order to build more peaceful and sustainable communities.

The report combines a granular local analysis of hotspots – carried out by researchers of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) – in vulnerable neighbourhoods of six cities across four continents with a broader discussion on lessons learned from dealing with organized crime in urban environments.

It looks at characteristics of vulnerability in urban drug markets, and explains how they are the result both of local factors (such as homicide rates, the urban landscape, marginalization, poverty and demography), and global ones (such as trafficking routes). Linking back to the title of the report, a section is devoted to competing markets for protection between state and non-state actors, which too often results in extortion and violence rather than increasing safety.

In a novel approach, the report shows how the term ‘urban drug markets’ can be broken down into at least five parts: excluded drug markets (on the margins of society); affluent drug markets; bulk supply (for the local market as well as transit); urban production; and locations that are controlled by organized crime. These different parts of the market, as well as links between them, need to be better understood if we are to address the problem effectively.

The second half of the report looks at effective responses to dealing with urban drug markets. It suggests a three-pronged approach: to promote sustainable communities and safer cities; sustainable or alternative development; and drug

- ◀ **Westside, Chicago:** schoolchildren use a designated Safe Passage route. The Safe Passage programme was started after concerns about children’s safety as they cross gang territories on their way to school. © Scott Olson/Getty Images

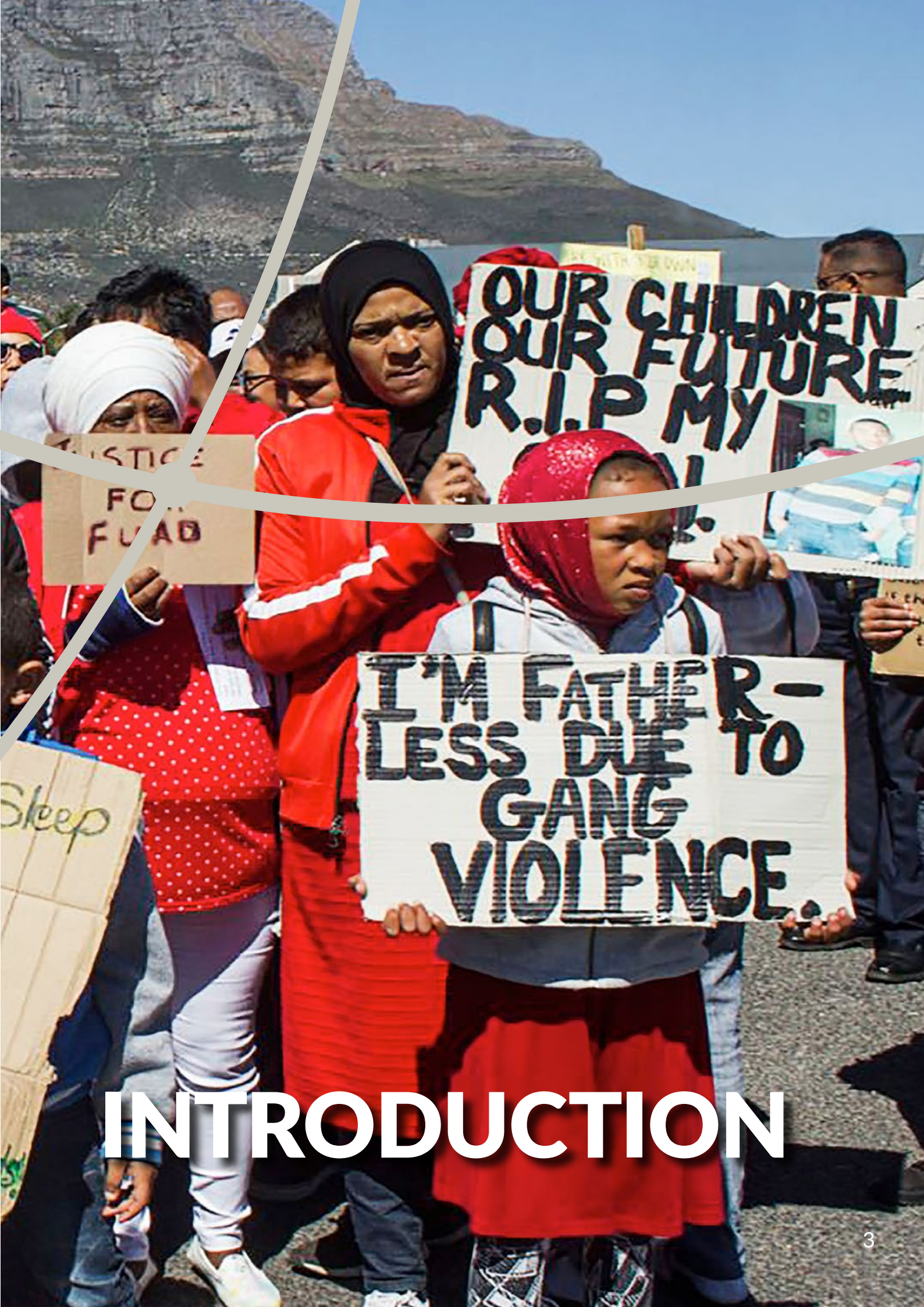
Failure to understand and deal with urban drug markets could increase inequality, violence and crime.

and crime prevention and control. These approaches are interlinked, particularly around the main avenues of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 16 on peace, justice and accountable institutions.

Remedial measures, drawing on examples from the six case-study cities, include violence-reduction strategies; an epidemiological approach to 'curing' violence; enhancing social resilience through community outreach; urban upgrading; focusing on youth; strengthening inter-city networks; mediation; harm reduction; involving the private sector; and deploying technology. The report also explores the opening created by the inclusion of a sizeable chapter on alternative development in the Outcome Document of the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs: how can approaches, guidelines and lessons learned from alternative development (thus far mostly in rural areas of drug cultivation) be applied to urban drug markets?

In that regard, it is worth noting that an expert group meeting on alternative development, that took place in Vienna in July 2018, recommended further research 'in order to properly identify the connection between urban development and the world drug problem, as well as how the existing United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development can be leveraged to tackle the drug challenges in the urban context.' We hope that this report helps to contribute to that process.¹

The report concludes by calling for more multifaceted, integrated and inclusive approaches to reduce violence and the harm of drugs, prevent crime and promote development in cities. Looking to the future, this is an issue that deserves more attention, as it is predicted that, by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas. Failure to understand and deal with urban drug markets could increase inequality, violence and crime, and jeopardize stability and development. This would not only have a detrimental impact on the neighbourhoods and cities concerned, but would also impede efforts to reach the SDGs, undermine the aspirations of the UNGASS process, and jeopardize the New Urban Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016.



INTRODUCTION



Masked men with guns patrolling the streets. People afraid to leave their homes. A state of emergency. The death toll and unemployment rising. Many of us experienced this reality during the COVID-19 crisis. But, for millions of people living in neighbourhoods plagued by drugs and crime, this is what life has been like for years.

This paper looks at the challenge posed by urban drug markets, particularly the impact on crime, safety, and development. It combines a granular local analysis – based on research as well as interviews with current and former gang members, police, drug users, social workers, court employees and representatives of civil society – with a broader transnational perspective. The study focuses in particular on drug markets in the cities of Cali, Colombia; Chicago, US; Cape Town, South Africa; Karachi, Pakistan; Kingston, Jamaica, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These cities provide a useful panorama of the factors that make cities vulnerable to drugs. Indeed, they share some common features (like high homicide rates, markets for protection/extortion, a youth bulge, and the fact that crime is clustered in poor and marginalized neighbourhoods). However, as demonstrated in this report, they have taken different approaches to tackling the problem. The choice of cities is also based on where the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) has expertise on the ground, from its own work in communities, as well as through initiatives and organizations that are supported by the GI-TOC Resilience Fund. This experience gives GI-TOC valuable local insights, and enables it to follow the evolution of drug markets.

The GI-TOC has looked at hotspots of criminal activity in several regions of the world. This report drills one level deeper to show how urban drug markets are often clustered in particular urban neighbourhoods. These areas are

◀ Community members take part in an anti-gang and anti-violence march, Cape Town, October 2018.

usually underdeveloped, and the local population often suffer from either a lack of protection or a competition for protection between groups and/or those groups and the state. Indeed, they share many of the same characteristics of vulnerability with people who live in regions where there is drug cultivation. The implication for remedial action is that targeted interventions in those specific locations can help to address the factors that have made those neighbourhoods vulnerable in the first place, and thereby build more sustainable communities while tackling urban drug markets. In that respect, the paper aims to bridge debates and lessons learned about alternative development with approaches that have been used to tackle urban development and security. This is consistent with the Habitat III New Urban Agenda, which included 'a new recognition of the correlation between good urbanization and development'.² It is also inspired by the Outcome Document of the 2016 UNGASS on the world drug problem – particularly Chapter 7 on addressing socio-economic issues and alternative development.³ Furthermore, it looks at how the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development can be applied to urban drug markets (rather than rural drug cultivation, which is the usual focus).

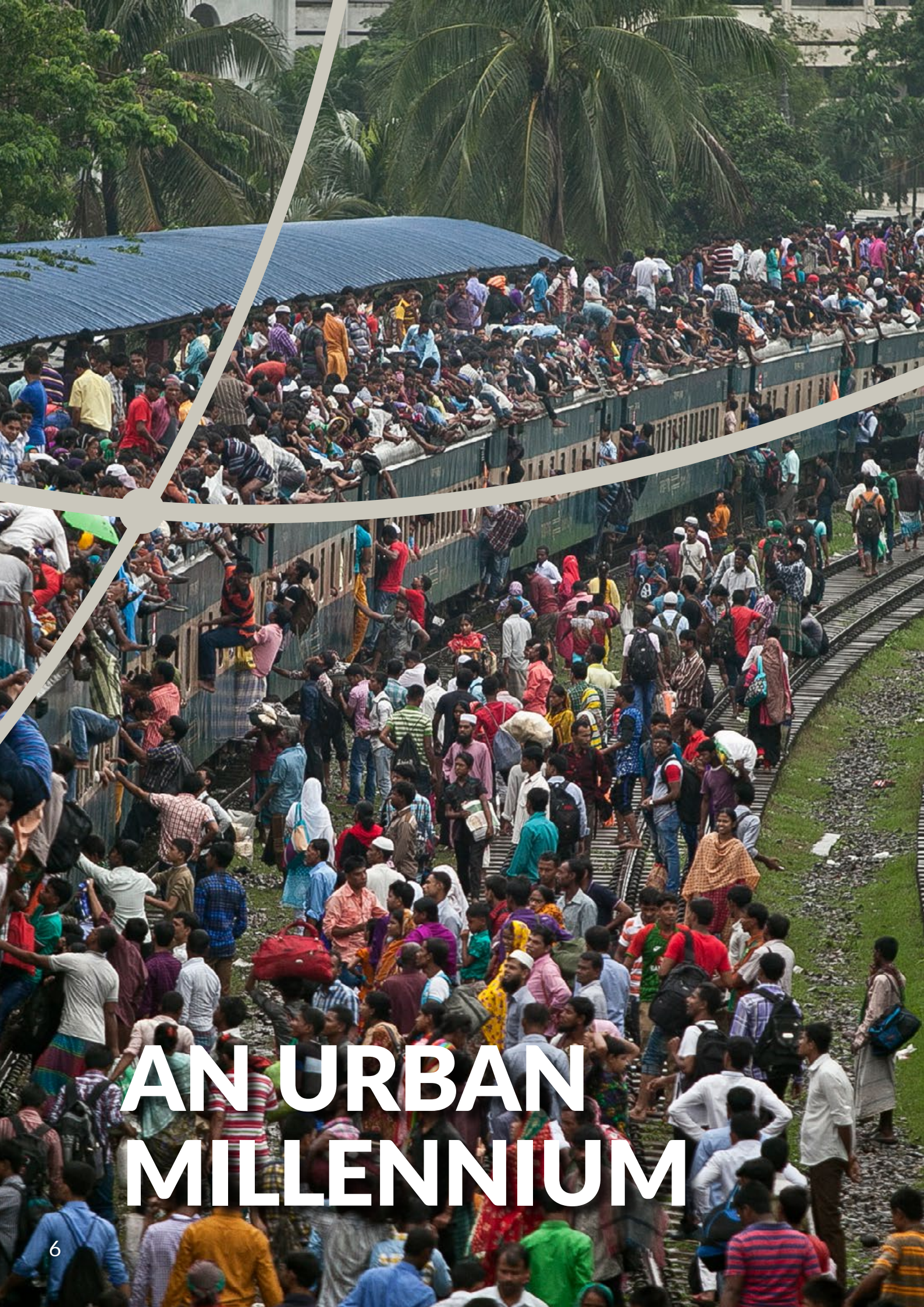
We commit ourselves to promoting a safe, healthy, inclusive and secure environment in cities and human settlements enabling all to live, work and participate in urban life without fear of violence and intimidation, taking into consideration that women and girls, children and youth, and persons in vulnerable situations are often particularly affected ...

New Urban Agenda, Quito, October 2016 (paragraph 39)

The paper first identifies the problems, types and impact of urban drug markets, and then examines what can be done about them. It looks at what can and is being done at the community level to strengthen local resilience to drugs within a broader context of improving urban management to make cities safe, resilient and sustainable (in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities). The topic of protecting communities takes on added relevance as calls to defund the police open important debates about the limitations of militarized policing and create new opportunities beyond law enforcement to build safer communities.

But local efforts will be insufficient if there are not broader interventions to address the market forces that fuel drugs and crime. Therefore, this report puts analysis of local hotspots into a wider perspective of how urban drug markets are part of global supply chains.

In short, this study looks at the impact of urban drug markets: why they develop in some cities; how they manifest themselves; how they shape and are shaped by their environment; and what can be done to disrupt them and help nurture resilience in these communities.



AN URBAN MILLENNIUM



We have entered what ex-UN secretary-general Kofi Annan described as the 'urban millennium'.⁴ More than half of the world's population now live in urban areas. Indeed, 8.3 per cent of the world's population live in megacities (defined as urban areas with more than 10 million inhabitants).⁵ It is predicted that, by 2050, roughly two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas. Cities are expected to absorb almost all the new population growth of the planet by 2050, while simultaneously drawing in millions of migrants from rural areas.⁶ Most of this growth will occur in developing countries. Indeed, it is predicted that 90 per cent of that growth will be concentrated in Asia and Africa.⁷ This is, on the one hand, an opportunity, what some have called the 'urban advantage'.⁸ After all, cities are engines of growth and innovation, providers of jobs, and centres for business, education, culture and healthcare. They are magnets for people seeking opportunities, and can offer a safe haven for those fleeing conflict. Besides, success and failure are relative: for some, the benefits of urban poverty are considered greater than the costs of rural misery. And so, people flock to cities, and will continue to do so in ever greater numbers.

On the other hand, unmanaged growth can create problems. Indeed, in many cities urban planning and development are not keeping pace with the rate of urbanization. Around the world, one in three city dwellers now live in slums where there is insufficient access to clean water, poor sanitation; people suffer from overcrowding and live in non-durable housing structures, with a lack of security of tenure.⁹ The number of slum dwellers on our planet now exceeds one billion.¹⁰ It is perhaps no coincidence that this figure corresponds with author Paul Collier's 'bottom billion'¹¹ – an underclass that is being left behind on the scrapheap of globalization. Left unchecked, the risk, as Mike Davis has written, is that the earth could become a 'planet of slums'.¹²

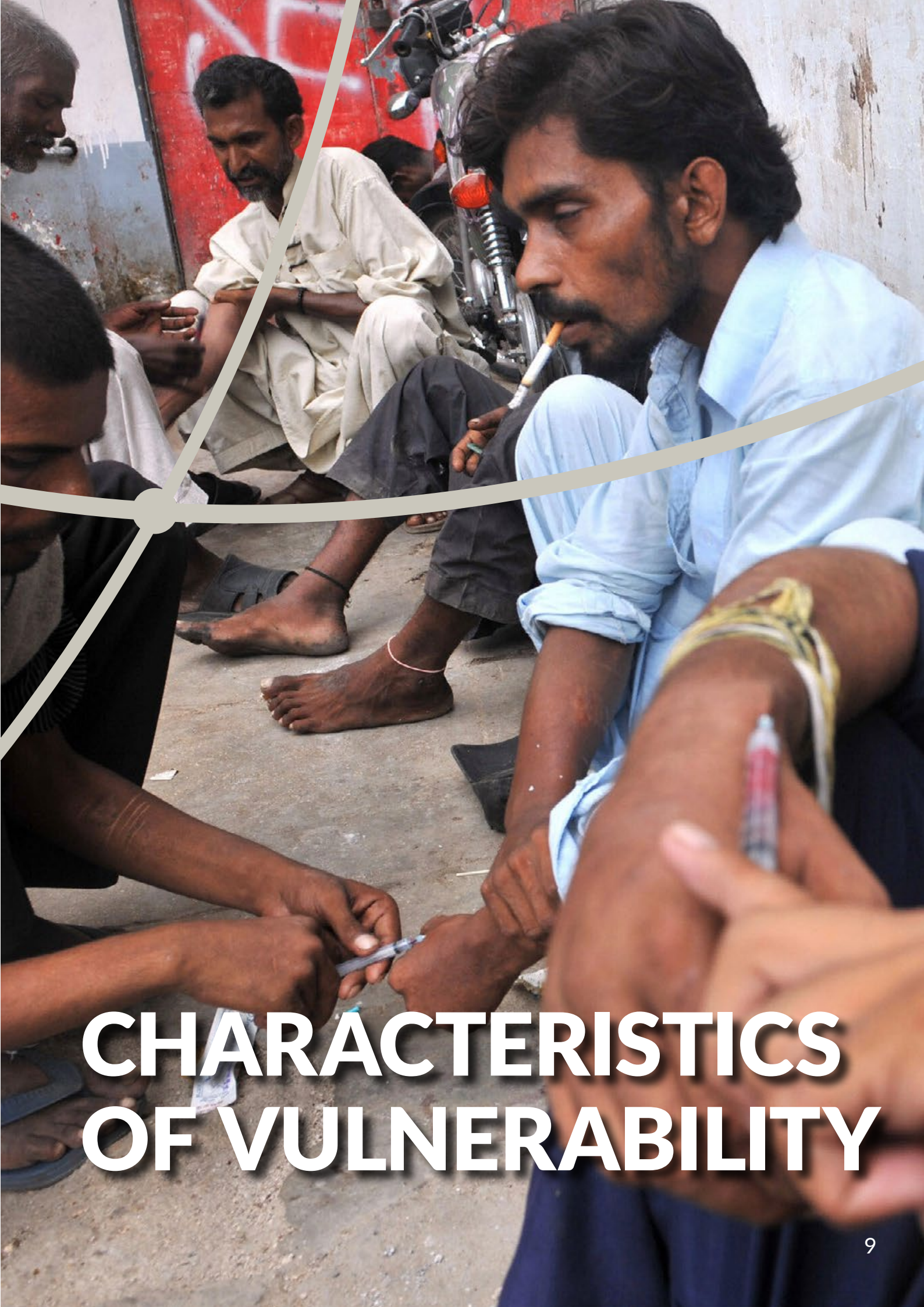
◀ More than half of the world's population now live in urban areas. Shown here are Bangladeshi Muslims in Dhaka ahead of the festival of Eid al-Fitr. © Allison Joyce/Getty Images

This obviously has implications for people living in such conditions. It also has broader consequences for security and development. As strategist David Kilcullen has warned, out-of-control urbanization is 'a recipe for conflict, for crises in health, education, and governance, and for food, water and energy security'.¹³ Since most urban growth is taking place in coastal cities (a phenomenon known as littoralization), the already existing complex challenges of dealing with sustainable cities could be compounded by climate change.¹⁴ It is therefore predicted that 'the humanitarian crises of tomorrow will be more urban than rural and that the urban centres of fragile and conflict-affected countries are some of the world's most vulnerable zones'.¹⁵

Urbanization is a broad topic, and well beyond the scope of this report. Instead, this study focuses on one dimension of cities under stress, namely the impact of drug markets. Given the size and population of urban areas, and the rate of urbanization, countries as a whole are affected by the destabilizing effects of the illicit drug economy and the associated challenges of organized crime and corruption. Illegal drug markets provide a large and growing source of power and revenue for organized criminal networks and mafia-like gangs all around the world, particularly in major cities. Therefore, urban drug markets have an impact not only on the neighbourhoods where drugs, poverty and crime prevail, but also, more widely, on the stability and development of municipalities, and even national security.

High-density housing in Cali, Colombia. © Carlos Mauricio Iriarte/EyeEm via Getty Images





CHARACTERISTICS OF VULNERABILITY



There is a considerable body of literature on what makes cities fragile. Such cities are not confined to particular countries or continents. They are found around the globe.

There is also research (and plenty of fiction) on 'failing cities', even 'feral cities'.¹⁶ Images of anarchic cities capture the imagination because the collapse of the city seems to portend the end of modernization and progress, and a breakdown of state security. Such dystopian renderings are certainly popular in films and literature¹⁷ – and have found a new resonance during the COVID-19 crisis.

In other cases, cities may not fail, as such, but criminal groups infiltrate civic structures to the point that they effectively take control of certain industries and services through extortion, intimidation, and their association with corrupt public officials – call it civic capture.

Many of the suggested policy responses focus on how to promote safer cities and sustainable communities, how to enhance resilience against climate change and prepare for disasters, or even how to fight in urban environments. But the impact of global illicit flows on a city's development and how they exacerbate risk factors for crime and violence at the community level are often not well understood.¹⁸ There is a need to clarify how drug-related crime in particular and organized crime in general impact local communities, and how such crime is linked to violence.

It is important to keep in mind that not all fragile cities have an urban drug market, and, conversely, not all cities where there is considerable drug use are fragile. Nor is it necessarily the largest cities that are most susceptible to fragility; rather, the smaller and medium-sized ones are most at risk. Taking these considerations into account, what is it that makes some cities more vulnerable to illicit drug economies than others?

Obviously, general fragility factors apply: lack of jobs or opportunities; poverty; rapid and unmanaged urban growth; large population bulges of unemployed, uneducated and unskilled youths; lack of public security; and failures in service delivery and public administration.¹⁹ In such environments, there is almost no social contract between the inhabitants and the local or national government. In such contexts, criminal groups may take advantage of this and fill the void. But when looking at urban drug markets, a number of factors deserve special attention.

◀ Drug users in Karachi. Traffickers commonly use Pakistan as a transit point for drugs from Afghanistan, the world's biggest producer of opium. © Rizwan Tabassum/AFP via Getty Images

Fragility

A study by the United Nations University refers to fragility as 'the accumulation of risks combined with the lack of capacity to cope with these, often interlocking, risks'.²⁰ Fragility factors related to cities include rapid and unregulated urbanization; income and social inequality; concentrated poverty; unemployment; policing

and justice deficits; real and perceived inequality; and natural hazard exposure.²¹ A study by the International Peace Institute observes that three common features of cities under stress are socio-economic and spatial segregation, rapid population growth and suboptimal governance systems.²²

Geography

Urban drug markets are situated along a supply chain: they are either close to the source of supply, along trafficking routes (such as major junctions, ports or distribution hubs), or where there is demand for drugs. For example, Chicago is a trans-shipment point for large volumes of drugs that are distributed throughout the Midwest. Karachi's drug market for cannabis and heroin is serviced from nearby Afghanistan, while seizures suggest that the city is a key junction for smuggling acetic anhydride (the precursor chemical needed to make heroin out of opium) in the other direction.²³ Cali

is located close to some of Colombia's biggest coca-growing regions; it is close to major ports on the Pacific; and it lies on a strategic corridor. Hence, its position ensures the supply of cocaine from South and Central America to North America. In Mexico, some of the most violent 'narco-cities' are places where rival gangs are fighting for control over key trafficking routes. These trans-shipment points are an 'opportunity space for criminal enterprise'.²⁴ The so-called *plazas* (smuggling points) in some Mexican border towns along trafficking routes have some of the highest homicide rates in the world.

Homicide rates

Homicide rates are a leading indicator of the presence of urban drug markets. Most of the victims and perpetrators are young men caught in a competitive cycle of drug-related violence. As Thomas Abt points out in *Bleeding Out*, 'Today's perpetrator is likely to be tomorrow's

victim'.²⁵ Communities awash with guns are often both a symptom and a cause of drug-related crime. Many urban areas with sizeable drug markets have higher rates of homicide than the national average.²⁶ And many of these crimes are committed using illegally obtained weapons.²⁷

City	Country	Population (million)	Rates (per 100 000 inhabitants)
Cali	Colombia	2.2	47 (2018)
Cape Town	South Africa	0.44	66 (2018)
Chicago	United States	2.75	20.8 (2018)
Durban	South Africa	0.6	38.5 (2018)
Karachi	Pakistan	15.3	12.3 (2012)
Kingston	Jamaica	0.60	54 (2018)
Lagos	Nigeria	13	20 (2016)
London	United Kingdom	8.9	1.3 (2018)
Moscow	Russia	12	2.5 (2018)
Mumbai	India	13	0.9 (2018)
Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	6.72	29.7 (2018)
San Salvador	El Salvador	0.24	50.3 (2018)

FIGURE 1 Homicide rates in major cities around the world
SOURCE: Seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx/files/estudio.pdf

Studies show that many of the most violent cities in the world are not in war zones but in Latin America, the Caribbean, the US and South Africa.²⁸ For example, Cape Town, with a population of some 4 million people, counted 2 868 murders in 2018 (a homicide rate of 69 murders per 100 000 inhabitants).²⁹ That said, it is important to look behind the numbers. Less violence does not mean a smaller drug market; rather, it can signal a more controlled one. For example, there are fewer killings in the communes in Cali that are controlled by groups with a relatively high degree of organization than in those where undisciplined youth gangs operate. Similarly, it has been argued that in neighbourhoods in São Paulo under the control of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (or PCC), homicides are less the result of violent turf wars and more a reflection of the group's desire to regulate security and death.³⁰

Infrastructure

Infrastructure creates the opportunity for urban drug markets to flourish. On the one hand, ports, major roads and airports facilitate the transportation that enables drugs to flow in and out. Infrastructure plugs the city into international markets, and links criminal groups with networks abroad, including in diaspora communities. On the other hand, infrastructure creates the interface between the licit and the illicit: banks, real-estate agents, airlines, corruptible public officials, transportation companies, lawyers, and others that provide the means that enable illicit trading to operate swiftly, efficiently and stealthily.³¹ Infrastructure can also relate to basic physical and organizational structures in a neighbourhood: such as lighting, alleyways and abandoned buildings, as well as links between the neighbourhood and the rest of the city.

Marginalization

Both a cause and consequence of urban drug markets is marginalization. Urban drug markets are usually concentrated in neighbourhoods characterized by poverty and violence. (Examples of such hotspots are described in the next main section of the report.) In slums and ghettos, unemployment is high, public services are limited, and there is little public security or governance. But marginalization does not mean isolation. Indeed, marginalized communities are intimately connected to other parts of the city, and to global illicit flows.³² Therefore, inequality is both a cause and a symptom of urban drug markets. Karachi, for example, is the richest city in Pakistan, but the majority of its population live in urban slums. Rio also has affluent neighbourhoods close to poor *favelas* (slums).



Chicago

Chicago has a population of around 2.7 million people.³³ Since 2001, there have been an average of 522 murders per year. In 2016, there were 762 murders – that's more than the number of homicides in New York and Los Angeles combined. In 2018, 84 per cent of all homicides in Chicago were the result of gunshot wounds. During 2018, almost 10 000 guns were seized by the authorities.³⁴ Between 2001 and 2016, more Americans were killed in Chicago (7 916) than were killed on active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan combined (a total of 6 888).³⁵ The high levels of homicide have earned the city the nickname 'Chiraq'.

Gang graffiti painted on a road sign in Chicago, a city with a high homicide rate.

© Scott Olson/Getty Images



FIGURE 2 The six urban case studies that inform the analysis of this report

Demography

A key feature of drug markets around the world is the fact that many of those either selling or using drugs are young men. Rapid population growth results in a large number of youths, for whom there are insufficient jobs, creating a potentially dangerous pool of unemployed young people who either become vulnerable to drug use or become the foot soldiers for criminal groups (or both). In the case studies used in this report, it was noted that young people are increasingly active in drug-related violence. As one observer said of the context in Cali, it is a situation of ‘boys killing boys’.³⁶ As a result, arguably, some young gang members are de facto urban ‘child soldiers’. Another danger is that young gang members move to other cities – often where there is a diaspora – to try their luck abroad. This exports a problem to other cities.

There is also often an overlap between marginalized ethnic groups and marginalized neighbourhoods. In the case of Karachi, there is a high concentration of Pashtuns and Baluchs (ethnically and tribally connected to Afghanistan) in unplanned slums. Both are active in criminal markets. In Cali, some of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods are populated predominantly by Afro-Colombians. In Chicago, the poorest and most violent neighbourhoods are overwhelmingly black (90 per cent), while the areas of Cape Town most affected by drugs have a population that is predominantly referred to as ‘coloured’, to use the apartheid-era race classification.



Outreach workers and volunteers from rehabilitation NGO, the Pakistan Society. Out of a population of 160 million, Pakistan has an estimated 4.5 million drug-dependent people, which makes it the largest heroin consumer market in the South West Asia. © Reza/Getty Images

Karachi

Karachi displays several of these factors of vulnerability. In terms of geography, Karachi is relatively close to Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of opium and a major producer of cannabis. Its long western border (in the region of Balochistan) is porous, and its 990-kilometre-long coastline is not well controlled – a fact that is exploited by drug traffickers.³⁷

Karachi, with a population of 14.9 million people, is also characterized by a high degree of inequality. On the one hand, there is a mushrooming population (the population grew by 80 per cent between 2000 and 2010), increasing joblessness, lack of social safety nets and poor prospects for young people. On the other hand, there is an affluent group within society exposed to cocaine, as well as 'party drugs' such as Ecstasy, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and Ice, fuelling drug demand. At the same time, there is a seamless supply of old and new drugs. To give one example, Karachi reportedly has the second-highest prevalence of cannabis use of any city in the world (after New York).³⁸

In this city, the problem of drug use is spreading. Distribution has moved from previously clustered drug markets to the micro level: many drugs are now sold from carts, grocery shops, in streets, or by drug dealers on bicycles. There is also a growing trend towards online drug marketing. A relatively new feature that has been observed is the increased deployment of women in selling drugs, as women attract less suspicion from the police. Drug use is also said to be spreading to schools in Karachi.

Shanty towns on the margins of the city are most prone to drug use and drug smuggling. One person interviewed for this report said that a neighbourhood named Rerhi in Bin Qasim town on the Karachi coast is so riddled with drugs that 60 per cent of its population, including women and children, are problematic drug users.

In short, Karachi is a city with both a major drug-transit and drug-use problem.



GLOBAL FLOWS AND LOCAL HOTSPOTS



Cities are usually hubs where people, roads and often rivers come together. They are places where large communities congregate to live, work and learn. Cities are dynamic: they are constantly on the move. Things are flowing into and out of them, such as water, traffic, money, people and ideas. Indeed, cities are often described as a living organism or an ecosystem. Cities have even been described as having a metabolism.³⁹

Historically, urban areas developed around marketplaces. Today, cities often have market squares where people come to buy food and goods, and to meet; they also provide markets for jobs – and for drugs.

Therefore, when looking at a flow or systems analysis of urban environments, it is important to factor in the impact of drugs on the metabolism of cities. Furthermore, it is important to understand the links between local factors and broader transnational illicit flows. Inner-city crime can become inter-city crime. In the same way that there are global networks among cities, there are links between urban drug markets that have an impact on one another. The link is often a diaspora community, or a change in market conditions or geopolitics, which creates new opportunities. This helps to explain why crime, like a virus, may suddenly appear to jump to another community far away.

For example, the evolution of the urban drug market in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, needs to be understood in the context of how rapid urbanization corresponded with the rise of the Medellín Cartel in Colombia. In order to be a player in the game with Pablo Escobar's cartel, the Red Command⁴⁰ needed to control a significant number of Rio's *favelas*.⁴¹

The reach and influence of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, or MS-13, cannot be understood without looking at links between affiliates in the United States (particularly Los Angeles), El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico, particularly as a result of migration and deportation. Meanwhile, Chicago is a pivotal drug (particularly cocaine) distribution hub for Mexican criminal groups, such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, among others.⁴²

◀ Substandard housing characteristic of parts of downtown Kingston, Jamaica. Urban crime tends to be clustered in poor and marginalized neighbourhoods. © Peeterv/iStock

A culture of drugs and crime

Despite the diversity of urban drug markets around the world, it is striking how similar the culture of crime is in these various urban neighbourhoods. Young men – and they are mostly men – dress in a similar way, listen to similar types of music, watch and reference similar films (often to do with *mafiosi* or gangs), covet fashionwear brands, and like to show off their guns and cars. And they make use of social

media to deal in drugs and promote themselves. Quite often, the young people dealing drugs are also taking drugs, not least since they are often paid in kind. As observed in the case of foot soldiers for Baloch gangsters in Karachi: 'The gangs hire the kids, get them addicted to crystal [meth], and then make them do crimes when they are high so they have no fear. Then they pay them with more crystal.'⁴³

The significant increase in drug-related crime by Albanian gangs in London in the past few years is related to the rapid rise of Albanian networks in the cocaine distribution business over the past decade. Drugs from Latin America pass through European ports, including Rotterdam and Antwerp, en route to the UK.

Or take the example of Kingston. The high rates of drug-related violence can only be understood in the context of transnational links to illicit activities, particularly the trafficking of guns and drugs. Arms trafficking is a feature of Kingston's criminal landscape, with illicit arms being trafficked from the US and Haiti – often traded in the latter for meat or other foodstuffs – on a regular basis and distributed to gangs, who use firearms to ensure territorial control.⁴⁴ Lax US gun laws enable Jamaican gangs to obtain firearms, since American weapons can be purchased and shipped directly to Jamaica from the US – under certain circumstances, and even using the internet – without any background checks or legal obstacles.⁴⁵ Although the weapons are often traced back to murders, Jamaican authorities have not been able to interdict the supply of firearms, which has been linked to the American narcotics trade.

Kingston is a hub for cocaine trafficking, a trade that is mostly controlled by Colombian cartels.⁴⁶ In 2015, Jamaica decriminalized the possession of small quantities of cannabis, but there are few controls.⁴⁷ As a result, some of the cannabis that is grown is traded for cocaine, for example in Costa Rica, where Jamaican 'high red' marijuana (which is popular but illegal in

most of Central America) is in demand.⁴⁸ Indeed, ganja, as it is known locally, is being used as equity; as one observer said, 'it's like growing money'. As a result, there is apparently so much cocaine in the country that it is being stockpiled in containers and warehouses waiting for a destination.⁴⁹

Transnational networks also play a key role in extortion, drug trafficking and gang violence. In the 1980s, a number of Jamaicans emigrated to escape violence and hardship at home.⁵⁰ A small percentage of those who went to Canada, the UK and the US either had a criminal background, or became involved in criminal activity in their new homelands. Whereas in the 1970s and early 80s, much of the violence had been related to political feuding, by the late 1980s and early 90s, Jamaican gangs in North America (referred to as 'posse') and the UK (where they are known as 'Yardies') were involved in trafficking of crack, as well as in illegal gambling and extortion.⁵¹ Some Jamaican expats were deported to Jamaica; others would come and go voluntarily. In both cases, they brought their skills and networks with them. Jamaican gang members were, in effect, the carriers of the crime disease.

Links between the urban crime market in Kingston, traffickers in Latin America and diasporas in North America and the UK show how local conditions can be affected by transnational networks,⁵² or, in the words of Kilcullen: 'As coastal urbanization and connectedness increase, transnational networks of this kind, tapping into the flows of urban connectivity between home populations and diasporas, will increasingly be able to

create transnational systems of competitive control that mimic the functions of the state and compete with governments.¹⁵³

There is another diaspora, for example to take into consideration, namely gang members in prison at home or abroad. Imprisoned gang members can exercise considerable influence, even behind bars. This is certainly the case with the PCC in São Paulo, the MS-13, the Italian mafia and some of the Jamaican gangs. Connections made on the inside often lead to new alliances on the outside.

Furthermore, there is a disturbing trend observed in some urban drug markets in which young gang members have made a transition from activities related to exploiting their gang turf to becoming hired foot soldiers deployed to carry out drug sales, extortion and assassinations for criminal groups following chains of command that are often located outside of the particular city. This phenomenon has been described as a third generation of gangs, which are primarily mercenary in orientation.⁵⁴

In short, organized crime and illicit flows exploit and exacerbate local vulnerabilities.⁵⁵ Therefore, addressing urban crime problems has to be done within a broader context of disrupting the flows and markets that bring crime to town. Disrupting illicit transnational flows can improve urban security. As was pointed out by contributors to this report who looked at the situation in Cali, well-intentioned efforts by that city's local authorities may be in vain if the networks that connect Cali with illicit markets (such as drug production and trafficking) in its surrounding areas remain intact. If this is not understood or adequately addressed, in Cali – and the same applies to other urban drug markets – 'threat networks will be embedded in a complex urban littoral environment, illicit activities will nest within licit systems and processes, and local threats will nest within networks and the regional and global levels'.⁵⁶

Organized crime and illicit flows exploit and exacerbate local vulnerabilities.

The ecosystem of urban drug markets

Cities are often big markets for drugs. Demand may come from affluent people (middle or upper class who can also afford lawyers and treatment), or poor people on the margins of society (who too often land up in jail or in hospital). In some cases, cities may be a source of supply for drugs, such as cannabis grown indoors, or synthetic drugs. More often, cities are a hub for bulk shipments of drugs: either to supply a sizeable local market, and/or as a transit node for drug trafficking, especially if the urban area is along a key transportation corridor (linked to ports, airports, or close to borders). The illicit economy associated with drugs usually creates a market for violence and for protection: both are for sale, and there are providers – sometimes who offer both in the form of extortion. In the worst case, establishments such as bars, clubs and restaurants, the sex trade, city blocks or even entire neighborhoods may be controlled by criminal groups.

In short, urban drug markets are more complex than the usual depiction of empty streets and crack houses. As illustrated in the diagram below, and based on the case studies, urban drug markets comprise several different components that often overlap and reinforce one another.

Excluded drug markets: under-developed and neglected neighbourhoods, economically disadvantaged, populated by groups on the margins of society, where there is a high prevalence of drug use and high rates of gun-related violence.

Organized-crime-controlled locations: such locations can be particular neighbourhoods or city blocks, key access points (such as ports or junctions), particular establishments (such as bars, clubs and restaurants, or the sex trade), or places associated with services provided by criminal groups. These locations are often where the



FIGURE 3 The urban architecture of drug markets.

state is weak or absent, where there is collusion between criminal groups and state officials, or where criminal groups own or control particular properties. Control over, or at least access to, key logistical and transportation hubs enables influence over bulk supply (see previous page). Control over particular locations also enables extortion, and drug distribution either to excluded markets (see above) or to affluent drug markets. Organized-crime-controlled locations may also be involved in urban production (see below).

Affluent drug markets: respectable neighbourhoods or fashionable establishments that discreetly provide drugs. This relatively hidden market is usually supplied by discreet, private dealers (with access to bulk supply) or via the post or the darknet.

Bulk supply: this wholesale market operates close to entry and exit points, is facilitated by delivery and transportation services, and requires storage facilities.

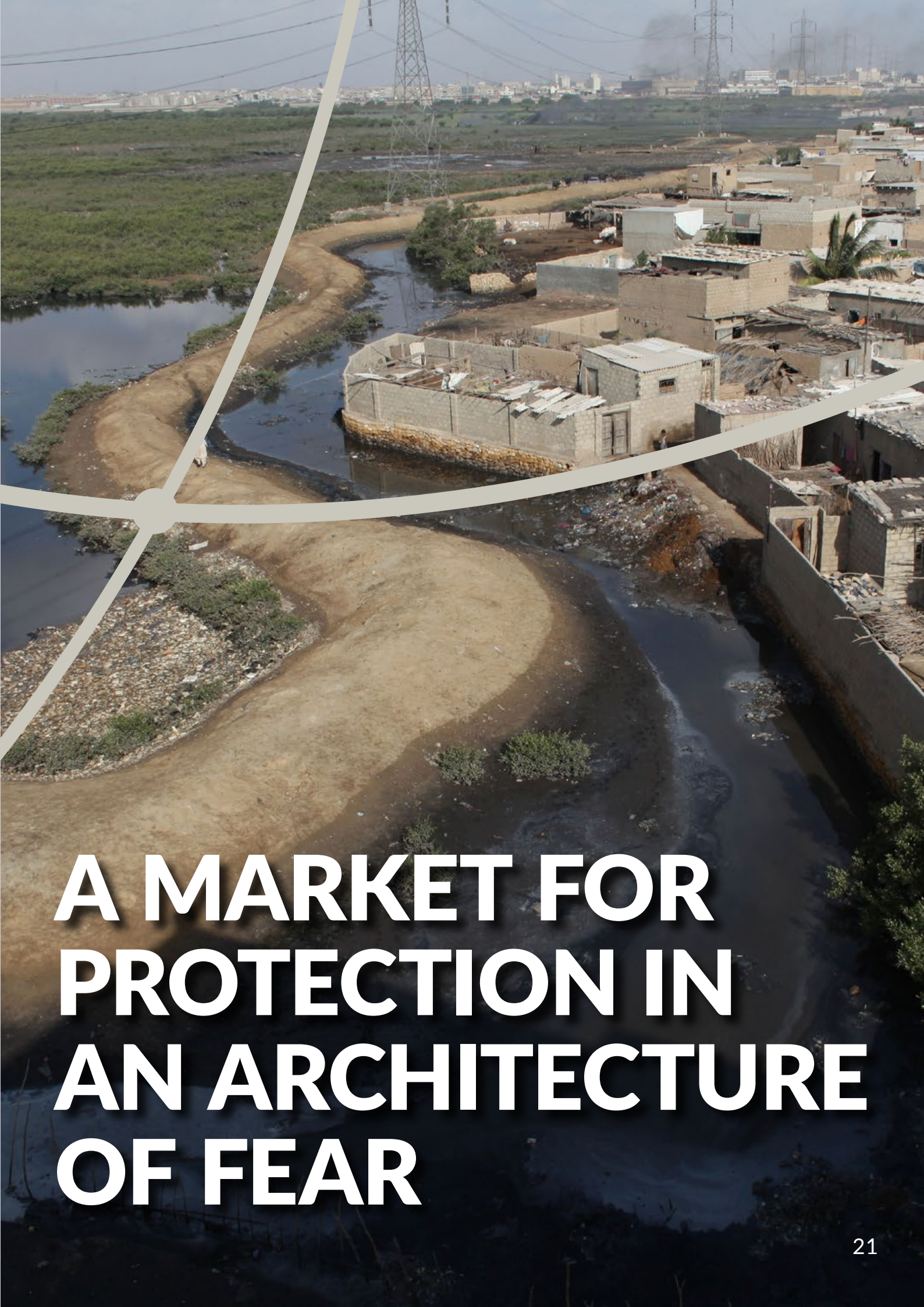
Urban production: an increasing amount of drugs, such as cannabis grown indoors or synthetic drugs, are being produced in cities. They are usually grown or produced in relatively small quantities to serve the local market.

Linked to bulk supply, urban production can also involve labs for cutting or mixing drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, as well as repackaging. While most of these drugs will be trafficked to markets farther afield, some may enter the affluent or excluded drug markets, or be used as in-kind payment for distributors working in organized-crime-controlled locations.

These types of markets may all be present in one city, to one degree or another. In the cities looked at for this report, Karachi and Cape Town have excluded drug markets. All six have crime-controlled locations. Rio and Chicago are examples of an affluent drug market. Kingston, Chicago and Cali show the characteristics of bulk supply. And Karachi shows some elements of urban production.

Since urban drug markets have these different characteristics, the responses to dealing with them must be calibrated accordingly. Addressing the problem of a major retail drug market and problematic drug use is, for example, different from disrupting the transit of bulk supply.

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A MARKET FOR PROTECTION IN AN ARCHITECTURE OF FEAR



Uneven and unmanaged growth, as well as the impact of drugs, is creating an architecture of fear. The result is walled neighbourhoods and gated communities for the rich, and sprawling slums or ghettos for the young, poor and angry. Public security in such urban environments is almost absent, so private actors scramble to fill the void, offering protection and other services that the state has failed to provide. The rich are guarded in their communities by private security firms, while disadvantaged neighbourhoods are 'protected' by armed groups, clans or neighbourhood associations, which maintain a modicum of stability and predictability. In the process, the state loses its monopoly on violence. Indeed, it loses its ability to govern.

That said, urban regions outside the control of the government are not 'ungoverned spaces', rather it is more accurate to refer to them as 'other-governed spaces',⁵⁷ in the sense that there is a degree of control or governance, albeit not from the state. This has been described as 'criminal governance' – a phenomenon where criminal interests regulate markets themselves, either because these are illegal or because state institutions are weak and corrupted.⁵⁸

Local gangs may 'tax' business in return for protecting them (often from themselves).⁵⁹ They may even provide basic welfare and social support, and a degree of governance where these are also absent. Ironically, both private security actors and criminal groups offer a 'security plus service' package.

The architecture of slums or ghettos provides a perfect cover for illicit activity. For example, in Rio, the slums offer 'a place of refuge and a base for [gang] leaders, a ready pool of marginalized young men who were willing to be recruited and additional income through the provision of services not offered by the state or private companies to local residents'.⁶⁰

Gangs and the community have a love-hate relationship. On the one hand, criminal groups can provide protection where the state is largely absent. This is often known

◀ A slum in Karachi known as 'mosquito colony'. Slums or ghettos can provide cover for illicit activity. © Ton Koene/Alamy Stock Photo

as a 'pax mafiosi', (peace among criminals),⁶¹ or what has been described as an 'illicit order'.⁶² In other words, follow the rules of the gang that controls a neighbourhood, and there will be no trouble. For example, at the outbreak of COVID-19, while the president of Brazil was downplaying the threat of the virus, gang members with loud-hailers were moving around the *Cidade de Deus favela* of Rio de Janeiro telling its 40 000 residents that they were imposing a curfew because nobody was taking the coronavirus seriously. 'It's best to stay at home and chill. The message has been given,' they told residents.⁶³

In Cape Town, interviews carried out for this report indicated that gang members are sometimes given refuge when pursued by the police and often hide their drugs in community residents' homes in exchange for a fee, groceries or pre-paid electricity vouchers.⁶⁴ Some older community members tolerate gang members because they consider them to be 'children of the community'.⁶⁵ In turn, gangs provide social services that the government fails to.⁶⁶ Some criminal groups pay for children's school fees, clothes, stationery and medication – in addition to the services mentioned above. They consider themselves to be social workers, providing essential services. For example, in Cape Town in early April 2020, gangs declared a ceasefire, in order to distribute food to struggling households affected by a COVID-19 lockdown,⁶⁷ while in southern Italy the mafia has been delivering essential goods to people stuck in their homes.⁶⁸

On the other hand, gangs are supported because people fear them.⁶⁹ This fear has deterred many community members from becoming state witnesses after witnessing gruesome killings by gang members.⁷⁰ Gangs are feared because of the impact they have on the community. Residents in gang-ridden areas are at increased risk of being victimized either directly or indirectly, or both. Some examples of direct victimization include damage to property, drive-by shootings, threats, and physical assault.⁷¹ The costs of extortion can also be crippling. Indirect victimization manifests itself through decreases in property prices, substandard municipal services and increased

financial loss to businesses because of break-ins and vandalism, which then impacts the quality of services these businesses can provide to the community.⁷² It is a classic vicious circle: under-development attracts crime, and crime creates further underdevelopment.

There is another level of protection that needs to be considered in the context of protection in urban drug markets, namely the relationship between criminals and the authorities. In many urban drug markets, drug lords enjoy a degree of protection through the bullet and the bribe. In Cape Town, for example, drug lords and dealers are notorious for having police and court officials 'on their payroll'.⁷³ The amount at stake varies considerably. For example, interviewees explained that bribes to the police can start from as little as 50 rands (€2.50) and go up to 60 000 rands (roughly €3 000) and more. The smaller bribes, also known as 'lunch money', are given daily to police officers to turn a blind eye to the drug dealing in the area. According to these interviewees,⁷⁴ corrupt police officers on drug dealers' payrolls, will arrest people caught buying the drugs (but not the dealers) to 'keep their [arrest] stats up'. This creates the perception that police officers are 'doing their work' to curb drug crime.⁷⁵

Some political figures in South Africa, such as former president Jacob Zuma and his son Duduzane, have come under scrutiny after meeting with alleged gangsters and drug dealers. In 2018, images circulating online of Duduzane Zuma meeting with Nafiz Modack, a suspected underworld figure, raised questions about the proximity of the Zumas to Modack's group.⁷⁶ In 2019, a convicted drug dealer and gangster, Radovan Krejčíř confirmed, in an affidavit before court, that he had met with Jacob Zuma and his son at their home and paid 2.5 million rands (€125,000) in exchange for asylum.⁷⁷

In Karachi, much of the violence that wracked the city in 2010 was carried out by gangs associated with either the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (commonly known as the MQM) or the Awami National Party. Extortion also seems to be a



Jamaican soldiers on patrol in Kingston's Tivoli Gardens, where some of the fiercest clashes between government forces and armed gangs have occurred. © Jim Wyss/ Miami Herald/Tribune News Service via Getty Images

major source of funding for the MQM, and the People's Aman Committee (PAC) – which is linked to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).⁷⁸ In 2015, a leaked video showed senior legislators of the PPP meeting with and pledging support to the feared leader of the PAC, Uzair Baloch.⁷⁹

A good example of how the market for protection works can be seen in Kingston. Jamaica's capital has a population of around 1.2 million. Many thousands live in 'garrisons', which are neighbourhoods where housing and jobs are allocated to supporters of the main political parties, particularly the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and their rival, the People's National Party. In this environment, there are close links between criminal groups and political parties. The groups protect the parties (as enforcers and mobilizers), while the parties provide a political umbrella for the criminal groups. As Kilcullen explains, the result of the political struggle between the two main parties has defined the very landscape of the city: 'It transformed poor neighborhoods, creating a mosaic of politically homogeneous, gang-controlled, party-sponsored garrisons, each competing for government resources and criminal income, each beholden to (and making demands on) a political patron, and all engaged in a perpetual violent struggle for political and economic advantage.'⁸⁰

One of the oldest garrisons is Tivoli Gardens in West Kingston, which is controlled by the Jamaica Labour Party. Between 1992 and 2010, this area was under the control of the gang leader or 'don', Christopher 'Dudus' Coke (who took over from his father, Lester Lloyd Coke). As one author politely put it, Dudus Coke was 'a community leader who also runs a criminal enterprise'.⁸¹ He led a group of armed followers, or 'shooters', known as the Shower Posse, who were involved in extortion as well as

trafficking guns and drugs (including through affiliates in Canada, the UK and the US). The role of the don is to act as a mediator and resolver of disputes, liaise with the police and city authorities to manage violence and crime, and be an intermediary for the distribution of government handouts – jobs, housing, welfare benefits, contracts – to the population.⁸² Apparently, residents went to Coke for help with tuition, legal aid, business loans, food and medicine.⁸³ It has been said that the performance of traditional state functions in such gang-controlled communities may actually have improved as the official government receded from its role as utility provider.⁸⁴ Coke's organization maintained its own penal code, known as 'the system'. He was apparently so powerful that the Jamaican police could not enter the neighbourhood without his permission.⁸⁵

However, the 'system' did not prevent violence. Kingston is one of the most violent cities in the world with a murder rate of 50.3 per 100 000 people.⁸⁶

The US eventually requested the extradition of Coke.⁸⁷ A bloody all-out assault on the heavily fortified Tivoli Gardens was launched by the Jamaica Defence Force on 24 May 2010, an operation in which 74 people were killed. Coke managed to escape but was captured one month later, on 22 June, at a police roadblock. As Kilcullen notes, 'the underlying patterns of social exclusion, social marginalization, and residential garrisons in Kingston remained in place after the military crackdown ended, meaning that the potential for future conflicts of this kind remains'.⁸⁸

Paradoxically, dons such as Coke, or structured criminal groups such as the Red Command in Rio, create a degree of stability because they are powerful enough to regulate and control their environment. Since Coke's arrest, it has been argued that the drug market continues but the organization has splintered into a number of groups. Violence increases as there is competition for market share. As one person in Kingston observed, since the arrest of Coke 'there is nobody to squash the beef'.⁸⁹ Similarly, a rapper in Chicago noted, in reference to the involvement of 15- and 16-year-old children in a lot of the city's gun-related crime: 'Ain't no guidance out here, that's the problem. That's why it ain't like back in the day. So it's like every man for thyself'.⁹⁰ It can therefore be observed that taking out leaders of urban gangs without addressing the underlying market forces and socio-economic conditions risks splintering or displacing rather than solving the problem.

We will integrate inclusive measures for urban safety and the prevention of crime and violence, including terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. Such measures will, where appropriate, engage relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing urban strategies and initiatives, including taking into account slums and informal settlements as well as vulnerability and cultural factors in the development of policies concerning public security and crime and violence prevention, including by preventing and countering the stigmatization of specific groups as posing inherently greater security threats.

New Urban Agenda, paragraph 103

Underdevelopment attracts crime, and crime creates further underdevelopment.

A photograph of a densely populated informal settlement, likely in South Africa, with a large mountain in the background. The foreground shows a person standing near a building with graffiti. The title 'CLUSTERS OF CRIME' is overlaid in large white letters.

CLUSTERS OF CRIME



While a city may have a high crime rate or a problem with drug addiction, the problem is usually clustered in certain areas of a city. These neighbourhoods are usually marginalized, either because of poverty, or they become further marginalized because of drugs and crime.

It is hard to make generalizations about the location of such neighbourhoods, but they are often quite literally on the margins or periphery of the urban area. It is also worth noting that urban drug markets usually flourish where there is an interface between a poor underclass (some of whom deal in drugs) and a rich upper class, who consume them. After all, like any market, buyers and sellers need to interact. For example, one of the most contested *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, Rocinha, has been a boon to gangs for years because this particular slum is immediately adjacent to 'cocaine-hungry middle and upper-class' neighbourhoods.⁹¹

A number of examples from research carried out for this report illustrate how urban drug markets are clustered in particular neighbourhoods.

Cape Town has a big and growing problem with drug use. State rehabilitation centres are unable to keep up with the number of people seeking or needing rehabilitation.⁹² This has given rise to several unregistered and therefore illegal drug rehabilitation centres, which use questionable methods to assist patients.⁹³ According to the director of a rehabilitation centre in Cape Town, every year its intake of patients increases by almost 50 per cent.⁹⁴ Since not everyone using drugs seeks help in such centres, that would suggest that the real number of drug users is even higher.

There are drug users and dealers throughout Cape Town. However, the biggest problem is in the Cape Flats parts of the city to the south and east. To understand drug abuse in the Cape Flats, a brief overview of the history of the area is required.

During apartheid, Cape Town's physical design was shaped by racist spatial planning. People classified by the apartheid authorities as 'black' and 'coloured' were forcibly moved to areas far from the city centre. These low-lying areas are known as the Cape Flats. Black and coloured people could not easily access employment or other services reserved for the white minority. The Cape Flats neighbourhoods suffered from inadequate service delivery and infrastructure.

◀ Cape Town has a big and growing problem with drug use, particularly on the Cape Flats, an area of which, Khayelitsha, is shown here. © John Warner/Alamy Stock Photo

Any city may have a high crime rate or a problem with drugs, but the problem is usually clustered in certain areas.

The apartheid government also failed to deploy adequate police services in the Cape Flats, which led to the formation of loosely structured gangs that provided some form of protection in the absence of the state.⁹⁵ However, these gangs soon started to demand protection money. The conditions created by the government inevitably ensured that gangs became an integral economic and social component of the Cape Flats. Many people turned to gangs for protection and/or employment, including in the form of drug dealing.⁹⁶ Today, it is estimated that there are more than 90 gangs in Cape Town, of which eight have a significant presence in the city.⁹⁷

‘The apartheid-driven spatial planning of the Cape Flats is so conducive to drug abuse,’ explained one interviewee.⁹⁸ ‘Unlike in affluent white areas, there are too many corridors and alleyways in the Cape Flats that make selling drugs so easy,’ he added.⁹⁹ ‘The state does not consider the psychological impact of the Cape Flats’ spatial planning on the community and how it impacts drug abuse,’ said Cape Town community activist Roegchanda Pascoe.¹⁰⁰

In these urban areas of drug use, there are usually higher rates of crime than elsewhere in the city. The dealers feed off the drug users, and this milieu creates an ecosystem of vice. As a worker at a court diversion programme in Cape Town said in an interview for this study, ‘As drugs have become more freely available, so too are people more willing to do whatever it takes to get their next fix [...] whether it’s stealing or committing other heinous crimes.’ She added: ‘There are [...] many cases of domestic violence, motor vehicle theft, shoplifting and rape because of drugs.’¹⁰¹ Crimes are not only becoming more frequent, but they are also becoming more violent.

Like Cape Town, Chicago also has an alarmingly high homicide rate. As shown in Figure 3, most of the incidents occur in a handful of districts: three in West Chicago (around Garfield Park and North Lawndale), and several in South Chicago. Indeed, almost half of all shootings and arrests in Chicago take place in the three districts of West Chicago. In 2018, most of the perpetrators and victims (57 per cent) were black men under the age of 30.¹⁰² Most had a low income, and only a high-school education.¹⁰³

Cali also has hotspots of crime. Homicides are heavily concentrated in the city’s eastern neighbourhoods. Indeed, about one-third of homicides in Cali occur in the five districts with the most socio-economically vulnerable populations.

In a city of around 2.5 million, approximately 26 per cent live in the so-called Distrito de Aguablanca.¹⁰⁴ Aguablanca’s settlements have been historically marginalized urban communities with a deficient provision of public goods and services. Neighbourhoods in this area have developed in large part from migratory flows of predominantly Afro-Colombians coming from the Pacific coast and the northern Cauca region. Many came to Cali fleeing violence resulting from Colombia’s armed conflict. Once they arrived in the city, they were introduced to dynamics of social exclusion and marginalization. Indeed, similar to the case of the Cape Flats, exclusion is literally built into the way the city has been designed. As seen in Figure 4, the districts on the outskirts of the city have the highest levels of poverty and the highest homicide rates.

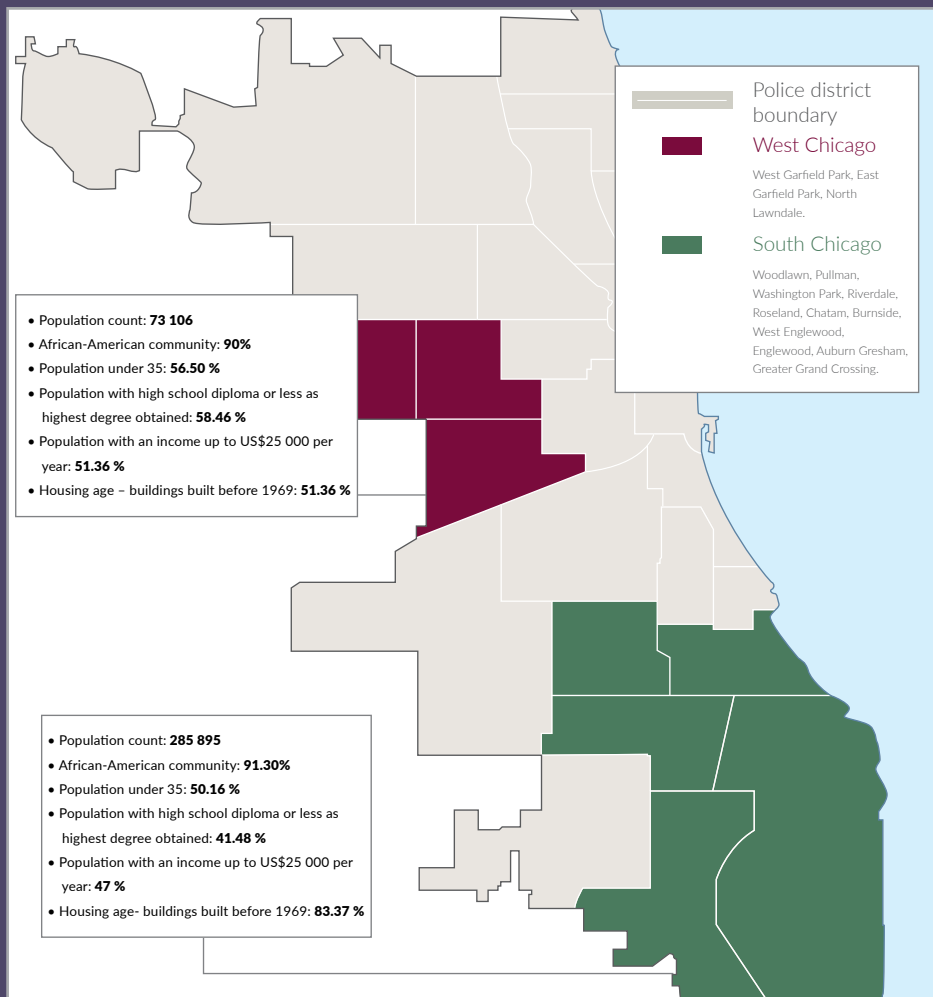


FIGURE 4 Vital statistics showing overlap between poverty, race, marginalization and homicides in Chicago

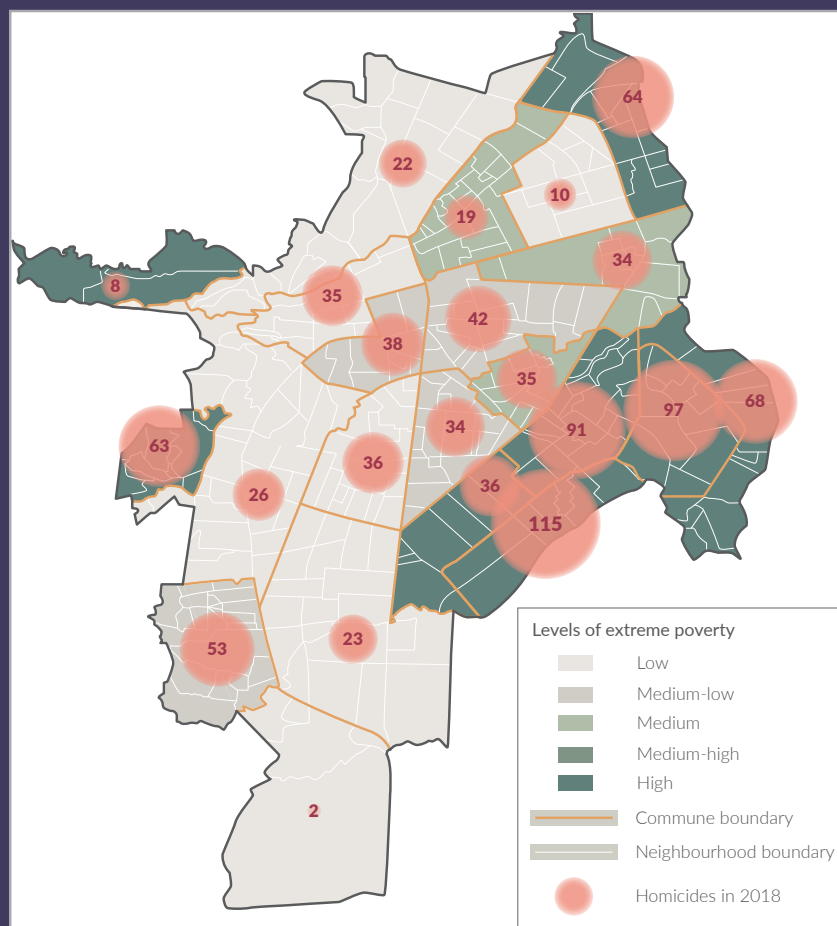


FIGURE 5 Poverty and homicides in Cali



Mano dura: Hammer without the dance

One of the most popular (and populist) solutions to deal with organized crime in urban neighbourhoods is to crack down on it heavily. The logic goes that if urban drug markets are a threat to security, they require a robust security response. This is sometimes referred to as a strong-arm, or '*mano dura*' approach.

The Tivoli Gardens operation in Kingston described above was not a once-off incident. The Jamaican government continues to take a military response to the problem of drugs and crime. In January 2018, it introduced a state of emergency, which is still in place. Indeed, even before the COVID-19 crisis, 75 per cent of Jamaicans lived in 'zones of special operations'. In these areas, the Jamaican defence forces follow a classic counter-insurgency technique of 'clear-hold-build'. They carry out periodic sweeps (or 'scrape ups', as they are referred to locally), arresting offenders. As a result, there is less crime, but there is also less freedom and less business too, and the underlying vulnerabilities have not been addressed by such operations. Local experts say that this approach is not sustainable over the long term. And criminals seem to be finding a way around the restrictions, for example by using tourist buses – which are not stopped at checkpoints – for smuggling. The state has tried to complement the tough law and order approach with urban upgrading and more attention to reducing socio-economic vulnerabilities through

its Community Renewal Programme. It is a mechanism to promote multiple-agency collaboration and community involvement in initiatives focused on: social transformation; socio-economic development; physical transformation; youth development; governance, safety and justice in vulnerable communities.¹⁰⁵ But roll-out has been delayed in part due to ongoing security concerns, and fears that state funding could land up benefiting 'the wrong people'.¹⁰⁶

Fighting a 'war on drugs' makes it easier for the state to legitimize calling in the army. The Mexican army has been fighting drug cartels around Ciudad Juárez, a city in northern Mexico, since 2008 under Operation Chihuahua. In October 2019, Mexican troops fought a battle with a heavily armed cartel in Culiacán, and briefly lost control of the city. In Guatemala, in December 2010, the army was called in to the Alta Verapaz region in the north of the country to take on the Mexican Zetas cartel.¹⁰⁷ There have been similar operations in Bogotá, where (in 2016) the police and army carried out a major operation in the notorious 'El Bronx' neighbourhood, and in San Salvador where the police and the army were deployed in 2017 to restore order in a district controlled by the MS-13 gang.¹⁰⁸ Since 2013, the Pakistani paramilitary forces (Rangers) have been engaged in operations in Karachi to crack down on drug-related crime.¹⁰⁹ In 2019, the South African government mobilized the army in Cape Town after gang-related violence had made the city one of the world's



Rio de Janeiro: An officer from the police special forces during an operation in the Complexo do Alemão favela, May 2014. Some 1.6 million Rio residents live in shanty towns. © Mario Tama/Getty Images

most dangerous urban centres.¹¹⁰ Even the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti took a robust response against street gangs in Port-au-Prince.¹¹¹

In such operations, it is important to identify the key players, their power bases, their criminal activities and markets, and possible links between urban and transnational criminal markets. They should also be part of a broader strategy involving development and community-oriented projects. Such an approach seems to have worked in Medellín in the early 2000s, and in Rio de Janeiro between 2014 and 2016, where a police presence – in the form of Pacifying Police Units – were part of a broader set of interventions.¹¹²

But under President Bolsonaro, the tactics have become more heavy-handed. In Rio, military police use heavy equipment and even sharpshooters in helicopters to try to suppress gangs in the *favelas*. But it has been argued that the militarization of security policies is a reflection of the decline in state legitimacy, and has only served to exacerbate the problem. It has apparently had little or no impact on the ability of criminal groups to establish rules, recruit locals and extort taxes, nor does it tackle the illicit economies bankrolling the arsenal and manpower available to criminal groups.¹¹³ Indeed, such operations can sometimes exacerbate violence and create deeper resentment against the state.

Although such *mano dura* operations can help to restore order, there are also dangers that short, sharp shocks can lead to a large death toll (some of them extrajudicial killings), injuries and other human-rights abuses. Pacification is not the same thing as building or sustaining peace. If efforts to reassert state authority are not combined with measures to reinstall social services and promote development, then when the soldiers and police leave, the old problems simply return. And if such operations acquire a degree of permanence, then they lose their emergency character.

If one takes an epidemiological approach to fighting crime, like the ‘hammer and the dance’ approach suggested as one way of tackling COVID-19, in most cases what we see is the hammer without a dance. Such an approach would be like imposing a state of emergency to stop the coronavirus without having any medical or social support, or the economic incentives needed to reinvigorate the economy. Or to use an analogy from communities involved in drug cultivation, it would be like eradicating the crops without providing any sustainable alternatives. Furthermore, such operations do not address the market forces that created the incentives for illicit activity in the first place. Therefore, a wider set of approaches is needed to prevent and respond to drug-related crime, improve public health and promote development.



C.H.A.
TENANT
PATROL

EFFECTIVE RESPONSES



Having identified the problem and impact of urban drug markets, this section looks at what can be done about them – but beyond a militaristic *mano dura* approach. It should be emphasized that this paper does not purport to address the wider challenge of how to tackle fragility in cities in general, but specifically how to reduce the impact of urban drug markets.¹¹⁴ A number of ideas will be shared, drawing in particular on approaches tried in the six cities that are the main cases examined in this report.

Generally speaking, what is needed is an integrated, three-pronged approach – one that looks simultaneously at how to promote sustainable communities and safer cities; sustainable or alternative development; and drug and crime prevention and control.

Obviously, the main emphasis of each of these three approaches will depend on the nature of the urban drug market. For example, an excluded drug market would require a strong emphasis on health and development, as well as urban upgrading. Dealing with bulk supply and organized-crime-controlled locations would require an emphasis on law enforcement.

The following are a number of possible approaches to consider when looking at strategies to reduce the impact of urban drug markets. It should be kept in mind that since risks to security and development in cities are interdependent, the responses should be similarly interlinked.

These responses are inspired by approaches taken by communities in the case studies that inform this report. Their success lies in their ability to respond to local conditions. In that sense, they are not automatically transferable. Nevertheless, because factors of vulnerability are often similar, the approaches could be helpful and replicable for other communities that face similar challenges.

A red thread that runs through them all is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Implementing the SDGs in cities would go a long way to reducing vulnerability to urban drug markets and organized crime. It is worth noting that of the 169 targets that underpin the SDGs, more than 12 per cent (23 targets in total) relate to mitigating organized

◀ Women of the Chicago Housing Authority Tenant Patrol escort children to school at the Ida Wells Housing Project, which is threatened by gangs. © Ralf-Finn Hestoft/Corbis via Getty Images



FIGURE 6 A three-pronged approach to urban drug markets

crime.¹¹⁵ SDG 11, for example, which addresses sustainable cities and communities, underlines the notion that sustainable development cannot be achieved without significantly transforming the way we build and manage our urban spaces.¹¹⁶ And almost every target of SDG 16 (on peace, justice and accountable institutions) deals with organized crime.¹¹⁷ For sustainable solutions for urban drug markets, development and crime fighting must go hand in hand.

Figure 6 shows how to promote sustainable solutions to urban drug markets. The main boulevards reflect SDGs 11 and 16. The other streets (and the symbols around them) represent a variety of possible approaches. The overall design shows how these various measures are inter-linked – illustrating the importance of an integrated and complementary approach.

Assessing the situation

The first step is to assess the situation because without informed analysis a strategic response will be unlikely, or different interests may drive a set of fragmented projects and programmes.¹¹⁸ The Urban Safety Governance Approach, developed by UNODC, emphasises the need to adopt a strategic approach to safety and good governance based on an in-depth understanding of how a wider set of localized risk factors, including weak urban planning, environmental degradation, and antisocial behaviour, interact with external threats, such as illicit flows, to create conditions of insecurity, which includes different forms of ‘criminal governance’ that seek to subvert city and state governance.¹¹⁹ Such assessments can be done through an urban security audit. There are also plenty of guidelines to draw on, including from UNODC, UNDP, UN-Habitat and the OECD, which focus on safer cities, resilience and sustainable urbanization.¹²⁰



FIGURE 7 A roadmap to safer cities

That said, these frameworks focus on ‘safety governance’ in general rather than explicitly on urban drug markets. There is scope for a sharper focus on this issue. At the same time, drug-specific interventions need to be nested in a wider strategy of urban management. Furthermore, it is important to consider the sequencing of interventions, and to calibrate the impact of development in one area (for example, urban planning, community policing or youth employment

schemes) with more drug-specific programmes. Finally, an assessment should not be a one-off exercise. It should be part of a culture of evaluation that examines the impact of a broad range of social, economic, environmental, security, and development factors and incorporates lessons learned into a feedback loop in order to improve the implementation of future projects and programmes. Using data strategically can enable more targeted and effective interventions.

Violence-reduction strategies

Single-issue interventions (whether they take the form of a robust law-enforcement action, a stronger focus on drug use or urban renewal) seldom work. What is important is to have a comprehensive strategy, and to adapt it over time. The strategy needs to be developed in an inclusive way (involving all relevant stakeholders), and be sufficiently resourced and sequenced.

One example is the Peace Management Initiative (PMI), which was launched in Kingston in 2002 (under the auspices of the minister of national security) to defuse drug-related violence in the city. The initiative included individuals from civil society, Jamaica’s two main political parties, as well as officials from local government. The PMI resulted in a gang truce in 2008, regarded as the first of its kind in Jamaica.¹²¹ The PMI has expanded its work to include mediation, the establishment of peace councils, grief counselling, youth empowerment (particularly through sport) and facilitation of the (re-)entry of critical stakeholders into community transformation and development projects. The PMI also has a violence interruption initiative. According to one study,¹²² a PMI intervention in 2005 in a Kingston parish (community) of 15 000 residents managed to reduce the homicide rate by 89.2 per cent in the first year, and was sustained for several years afterwards.

Another good example comes from Cali, where in the early 1990s, the government launched a strategy around the themes of development, security

and peace. It took an epidemiological approach to violence reduction, building on data-collecting capacities to identify risk factors associated with crime. It aimed to address poverty and inequality, as well as a culture of violence. Other elements included improving education of police officers, enhancing access to justice (for example, by investing in dispute-settlement mechanisms), fostering civic education through public campaigns, improving access to public education, and offering better housing opportunities through the provision of public or subsidized housing projects.

Subsequent strategies in the city, for example one from 2012 to 2019, focused in particular on so-called territories of inclusion and opportunity (including 65 neighbourhoods in 11 communes characterized by high levels of poverty and social violence), and investing in the city’s security infrastructure. Furthermore, the Programme for the Comprehensive Treatment of Gangs (supported by the local state university, the police and the Catholic Church) was launched to give gang members an opportunity to ‘demobilize’¹²³ by providing a subsidy to participants to access psycho-social services, participate in personal skills and employment qualification opportunities, and provide community service through the *Gestores de Paz y Cultura Ciudadana* (promoters of peace and civic culture) programme. The city claims that this programme contributed to an 80 per cent reduction in gang-related homicides between 2016 and 2018.¹²⁴

'Curing' violence

It has been argued that 'violence has all of the historical, population, and individual characteristics of an infectious disease'.¹²⁵ After all, it is often said that cities are 'plagued' by violence. Indeed, like a disease, violence has routes of transmission, incubation periods, and different clinical syndromes and outcomes.¹²⁶

Violent crime can also mutate and transform itself, like a virus. Furthermore, like a contagion, the more one is exposed to violence the more one is likely to act violently.¹²⁷ Following this logic, 'curing' violence can use the same strategies as reversing infectious epidemic processes. These include detecting and interrupting ongoing and potentially new infectious events (such as a territorial dispute, retaliation for a shooting, a major arrest, anniversaries, release of a key individual from incarceration); determining who is most likely to spread the disease and then reducing the likelihood of its spreading through interruption; and changing the underlying social and behavioural norms, or environmental conditions, that directly relate to the spread of the infection.¹²⁸ The theory of change is that if violence is a learned behaviour, then steps can be taken in chronically violent neighbourhoods to change behaviours and teach healthier norms that reject the use of violence. As Thomas Abt observes, 'homicides occur in predictable places, driven by identifiable people, and triggered by well-understood behaviors. Target these patterns and you can stop much of the killing'.¹²⁹

This approach has been applied by Chicago-based NGO Cure Violence. Starting in the crime-riddled West Garfield neighbourhood of Chicago in the 1990s, the programme (originally called The Chicago Project for

Violence Prevention, and CeaseFire) was then applied in other cities in the US and abroad. The methodology begins by analyzing the clusters involved and transmission dynamics, and using violence interrupters, outreach behaviour change agents and community coordinators (particularly from the 'in-group') to interrupt transmission (or the contagion), to stop the spread of the violence, and to change underlying norms. Interrupters include community workers, former gang members or police officers. The logic is that if violence is perpetuated by tit-for-tat reprisals, breaking the pattern of revenge can interrupt, if not stop, the violence. As noted in the section entitled 'Assessing the situation', continually analyzing data is vital. For example, CureViolence keeps a database of all incidents, and staff analyze every shooting that occurs to determine the causes, the necessary response to prevent a retaliatory act of violence, a community response, the reason the shooting was not prevented, and what can be done to prevent shootings in the future.¹³⁰

'Curing' violence also has a psychological component which is often described as a Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS). A central element of GVRS is cognitive behavioural therapy that 'is designed to make people more aware of their own thoughts, help them better understand the consequences of their actions, and motivate them to adopt new strategies for both'.¹³¹ Through, for example, anger management and personal problem solving, people are able to change the way they think and act in a way that not only reduces violence, but helps them practice new choices and habits.

Enhancing social resilience

One reason that drugs and crime flourish in certain communities is that antibodies among those communities are weak. Therefore, a major challenge is to strengthen resilience and develop social antibodies to help resist the disease of crime. This means, at its heart, rebuilding a sense of community. As environmental and political activist George Monbiot notes, albeit in reference to a broader crisis within modern societies, it is vital to confront the politics of alienation with a

politics of belonging. As he argues, 'community is the place from which a new politics begins to grow'.¹³² In some cases, that sense of community can be rebuilt by an effective mayor or committed local officials. In others, the drive comes from civil society. What is key is to ensure the empowerment, ownership and responsibility of the affected local communities.¹³³ As has been pointed out based on considerable research, 'any sustainable effort must be seen as legitimate, and

*It is vital to confront
the politics of
alienation with a
politics of belonging.*

legitimacy requires the meaningful participation of those who are most affected by the effort's activities'.¹³⁴ This report has highlighted a few good examples; one is the Manenberg Safety Forum in the Cape Flats. The work of this organization includes providing food, victim support, trauma counselling, as well as a 'healing circles' programme, which enables activists and community leaders to share experiences, and provide one another with support to ensure that they are mentally, physically and emotionally fit to address community challenges. Meanwhile, in Karachi, a group known as Edhi provides a network of social services, including a fleet of ambulances, homeless shelters and orphanages. This is not only an important source of resilience to assist the community, but also provides valuable insights into and data on the violence in Karachi.¹³⁵ In Chicago, a number of outreach organizations have banded together as Communities Partnering 4 Peace.¹³⁶ Their work involves violence prevention, trauma-informed care, creating and reclaiming safe community spaces, and providing outreach training (through a metropolitan peace academy).

Such brave and dedicated people are the glue that can keep their communities together; they provide a better vision of what society can be, stand up against violence and injustice, empower young people, and support those who are fighting problematic drug use or trying to escape a life of crime. Where possible, the GI-TOC supports such civil-society initiatives through its Resilience Fund. Such support networks are more important than ever because the vulnerable may be particularly hard hit by the impact of COVID-19 as states struggle to cope.

Urban upgrading

One proven method of strengthening resilience in urban drug markets is to improve the environment where such markets flourish. Since poor housing and substandard infrastructure are usually a reflection of deeper socio-economic problems, investing in neglected neighbourhoods can have benefits well beyond reducing drug markets. In order to achieve this, the process needs to be well prepared and it is essential to involve people from the affected communities. Urban upgrading in drug-prone communities usually includes a broad range of strategic responses, ranging from social programmes targeting the most vulnerable groups of society to improvements in the functioning of schools and clinics, upgrading of vulnerable areas, and the collaboration between state and non-state forms of community policing. It is also important to focus on property rights.

Furthermore, urban renewal projects can convert public eye-sores such as abandoned buildings and lots into public spaces – for example, parks, sport areas and green spaces – that can be used by the community.¹³⁷ In Cali, an urban upgrading project in an area called Barrio Potrero Grande led to the development of parks and schools as well as a cultural centre, which was well received by the local community.¹³⁸ Another project, in the Aguablanca district, organized by the local group Casa Cultural el Chontaduro, was designed to transform the district's geography of crime and disorder into a space where young people could reaffirm their identity and build peace. This is being done by organizing the performance of carnivals, concerts and outdoor cinema in an attempt to recover the public space, as well as working with black youth and women to enhance their participation in local governance. In Medellin, the government built two libraries



Harare Safe Node area, Khayelitsha, Cape Town.

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Violence prevention through urban upgrading

In South Africa an NGO called Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) is working to improve the quality of life and social conditions in gang- and drug-ridden communities through social and spatial upgrading. In Manenberg (a neighbourhood in the Cape Flats affected by gangs), VPUU developed a youth lifestyle campus to promote recreational activities, such as sport and arts, and to provide a healthy environment for at-risk youth to do their homework.¹³⁹ It is conceived as a safe place integrating many activities and partners, and is intended to become a hive of learning and healthy lifestyle where poorly educated, marginalized, at-risk youth can meet, play, have fun, learn, and improve their lives. In 2016, a youth safe-hub was opened in a secondary school servicing the communities of Manenberg and Gugulethu. It was established, inter alia, to address: lack of police and community safety around schools in the area; high crime rates and slow response to domestic abuse; lack of basic services; lack of facilities to address the socio-economic challenges; and youth at risk. The facilities, which are accessible only through a secure point of entry, include a

high-quality football pitch, a training academy, a youth café, a psycho-social support centre, social support services (including health and nutrition), a space for small business start-ups, and a networking space.¹⁴⁰ The Western Cape government, working with VPUU, has ambitious plans for further development of the youth and lifestyle campus to develop six theme-based precincts over 26 city blocks.¹⁴¹

In another gang- and drug-ridden community in Harare, Khayelitsha, VPUU improved infrastructure, including the provision of safe walkways and area lighting, and introduced area patrols. The Democratic Alliance¹⁴² noted that there was a 33 per cent reduction in crime in Harare since the VPUU implemented various urban upgrading programmes. A key element of urban upgrading is to provide adequate and durable housing. One observation from Manenberg (like other high-density urban areas) is that because of overcrowding, the only place that young people can find a sense of independence and escape from the squalid conditions is on the streets.¹⁴³

and a science centre in some of the poorest neighbourhoods. Examples such as these show the importance of creating and nurturing safe, neutral, public places that can support change and give people a greater sense of community.

Focus on youth

In urban drug markets, most crime is carried out by young people, and most victims of drug-related violence are youths. Therefore, it is vital to prevent the marginalization of young people. Inclusion strategies involve sports and cultural programmes, job training and education to strengthen self-esteem and a sense of belonging, and to steer young people away from drugs and crime. Empowering and employing young people in fragile neighbourhoods can be considered a form of preventive alternative development. It is also vital to ensure effective messaging to young people, and to work with their families to get ahead of anti-social, delinquent and even criminal behaviour.¹⁴⁴ One example is the Violence Interruption Program in Kingston,¹⁴⁵ which formed part of the Citizen Security and Justice Programme. The programme focuses on at-risk youths – young men who are regularly exposed to gang and drug culture. The programme, which started in 2013, has three goals: detecting and interrupting violence (which is accomplished through school, police and community trainings); mentoring of high-risk youth (through a case management system); and engaging and supporting community norms and values (which is accomplished through civic events). Currently, 600 young men are in case management. A key element of the programme involves

Children from the Kids Safe Zone, Baltimore, a neighbourhood centre that provides a safe place for young people in the community. © Andre Chung for The Washington Post via Getty Images



working with young people coming out of prison and/or those with a history of drug use in order to prevent recidivism, and to ensure that they can develop skills to give them sustainable employment. Case workers in this, and similar programmes, meet regularly with at-risk youth to change behaviours through dialogue and messaging, and to assist them with issues such as education, employment, training, mental health, drug use, trauma and the criminal-justice system.

In Chicago, the Becoming a Man (BAM) programme, launched in 2001, has reportedly been successful in helping young men to deal more peacefully and effectively with challenges in their lives. The 18-month programme offers a safe and respectful place for dialogue, teaches core values such as integrity, accountability, respect for womanhood and goal setting, and helps to build a sense of belonging as well as relationships built on trust within the group, and with counsellors.¹⁴⁶

Involving the private sector

Business has a lot to lose if urban drug markets flourish. Investors and visitors are less inclined to bring their money to a city if there is a risk of extortion, or risks to the security of property and staff. Therefore, businesses have a self-interest in contributing to the development of safer cities. This can involve lending their voice and leverage to anti-corruption and anti-extortion campaigns, supporting urban renewal and community development projects, as well as youth employment and business innovation ‘fab labs’ (small-scale computer workshops). A study in Cali highlighted the key role that business interests can play to transform local communities.¹⁴⁷

Harm reduction

Although it may be difficult to make people stop using drugs, steps can be taken to reduce the harm of drug use. The Step Up Project in Cape Town is a good example. This programme provides mobile tuberculosis (TB) and HIV prevention outreach services to people who use drugs by injecting.¹⁴⁸ During outreach, the programme provides testing and counselling on HIV, TB and sexually transmitted infections, and offers sterile injection equipment (including needles/syringes, cotton wool and alcohol swabs, as well as containers for the safe disposal of needles and syringes).¹⁴⁹ The Step Up team collect the used needles weekly; they dispose of approximately 10 000 needles a month.¹⁵⁰ Since 2018, Step Up has expanded its work to offer meals, one-on-one and group counselling, skills development and opioid substitution therapy. Service users also have access to a doctor and a nurse. There has also been cooperation with a project focused on sex workers who might be vulnerable to injecting drug use, and with a university clinic specializing in the prevention of viral hepatitis. This is in stark contrast to Karachi where, despite the creation of model addiction treatment and rehabilitation centres, access to harm reduction and drug treatment has been reported to be woefully inadequate.¹⁵¹

However, harm reduction in itself is insufficient. It needs to be combined with other measures that provide necessary support structures, social engagement and training to improve the well-being of those who are vulnerable to drugs.

Inter-city networks

In the same way that criminal groups have inter-city networks, it is important for cities to work together to learn from each other and to address transnational organized crime. There are, for example, networks of mayors who discuss issues of drugs and crime. In Europe, URBACT is an exchange and learning platform to promote sustainable urban development.¹⁵² The World Urban Campaign, which is closely linked to UN-Habitat, is an advocacy and partnership platform to raise awareness about positive urban change.¹⁵³ There is also a Cities Alliance, which works to help manage urban growth.¹⁵⁴ A more bottom-up approach can be seen in the Fearless Cities initiative, which has links to the 'remunicipalization' movement.¹⁵⁵ It will be interesting to see if and how such alliances can promote more effective local solutions within a broader global context: in other words the benign equivalent of what criminal groups are doing.

Mediation

One way of building peace in urban drug markets is through mediation. That said, there has been only limited analysis of how to win over or engage with individuals and groups who are involved in the illicit marketplace.¹⁵⁶ The standard policy repertoire against violent economies involves the confrontation or co-option of major stakeholders, or simply ignoring the problem in the hope that it goes away (which it seldom does). These approaches have their limitations. The problem with co-option is that states and markets have been co-opted by illicit or criminal groups, rather than the other way around. The problem with confrontation, as shown in the examples above of *mano dura* responses to urban crime, is that it seldom addresses the main drivers of violence (namely competition for the control of criminal markets) while escalating levels of armed violence and increasing civilian casualties.

Sometimes low-level, informal mediation can help. As a member of the Manenberg Safety Forum said: 'Whether we like it or not, we must live with them [gangs], so it is important for us to engage with them because we have to share the space with them.'¹⁵⁷ At a higher level, a major challenge is to get officials to even consider this option for fear of legitimizing leaders of criminal groups. Greater political dexterity and courage are needed to think of policy engagements that 'confound expectations of good governance or good policy'.¹⁵⁸ There are precedents, such as the gang truce that was negotiated in El Salvador in 2012 (which held for a year), a similar gang truce in Honduras in 2013, as well as gang truces in Boston and Los Angeles.¹⁵⁹ That said, there is a potential moral hazard in going too far in the other direction and compromising integrity by appeasing or buying off armed groups for the sake of expediency and short-term stability – in effect rewarding bad behaviour. This is a field that requires greater study, not least to learn from past attempts to negotiate such exits from violent economies.¹⁶⁰ More consideration is needed on the ethical and practical pitfalls, possible incentives or acceptable trade-offs, and what can be done to reduce the danger that groups involved in illicit activities will be strengthened rather than co-opted as a result of negotiations.

A bigger question is how short-term deals can be transformed into more sustainable transformative processes.¹⁶¹ As conflict response expert Achim Wennmann has pointed out, what is needed is a well-established network to support mayors and other city leaders in 'peace processes' in cities.¹⁶² Furthermore, because of the complexity of such process, guidelines – drawing on lessons learned and good practices – are needed for mediators and peacebuilders to help negotiate exits from urban drug markets and, more generally, violent economies.

Security and service providers

It could be argued that one approach to dealing with urban drug markets is simply to live and let live. If they have developed as a result of neglect, let them fester or fend for themselves. As long as criminal groups can maintain some sort of order and there is no spill-over into other neighbourhoods, why waste time and resources? As has been pointed out, ‘tacit agreements – particularly in major cities and in the nighttime economy – may exist between the authorities and those who practise extortion: payment is tolerated if violence is kept to a minimum.’¹⁶³ So why not scale this up? The problem with this cynical approach is that it comes at the expense of those who live in such communities – not least their fundamental rights and freedoms. Furthermore, it gives criminal markets the impunity to prosper and legitimizes criminal governance. But is it so far-fetched? As we have seen, in some slums, during the corona crisis, curfews are being imposed by ‘community leaders’, not the state. These slums are highly vulnerable to the spread of the virus, but state services are overstretched. Protection and assistance are being offered by local groups, both from civil and ‘uncivil’ society. As pointed out in a recent GI-TOC report entitled ‘Crime and contagion’, ‘in places where state reach may be weak, agreements with criminal bosses and groups may be tempting to enforce social distancing measures and, eventually, public order itself’.¹⁶⁴ This temptation might become even greater if (or when) the health crisis is followed by an economic crisis, or even social unrest. If municipal authorities fear disorder (for example, looting or riots caused by unemployment and frustration), they may have to rely on the de facto authorities in these neighbourhoods to maintain stability. The risk here is that, in return, criminal groups will gain greater legitimacy, and potentially wealth, if they are allowed to become the interface between the government and the people in terms of providing protection (for example, around health facilities), medical supplies and jobs, as well as basic goods and services while the state is occupied elsewhere. This will enable the proprietors of urban drug markets to position themselves (both vis-à-vis the state and the local population) as security and service providers.

‘In places where state reach may be weak, agreements with criminal bosses and groups may be tempting.’

Deploying technology

There is a growing use of technology to prevent and tackle crime in unsafe neighbourhoods, and to develop safer and smarter cities. For example, the use of CCTV for facial recognition is helping to fight crime, but is also opening up debates about human rights and data protection. Several cities, particularly in the US, are establishing real time crime centers. Chicago is a good example. After the crime wave of 2016, it opened district level strategic decision support centers. These have proven quite successful as fusion centres that gather and analyze information using technology from a wide range of sources, and at getting police closer to the communities where they work. Software tools include a public safety mapping that shows the locations of events of interest (calls for service, crime incidents, current locations of police vehicles); a display for video feeds from Chicago’s surveillance cameras; gunshot detection; and predictive policing software for identifying people



and places at higher risk of a crime. Technology can probably be mobilized to the greatest effect in local hotspots of crime.

The Chicago Police Department also increased the number of surveillance cameras in each district (about ten additional cameras with each Strategic Decision Support Center installation).¹⁶⁵ Criminals have been some of the first movers in terms of using technology to their advantage. It will be interesting to see how artificial intelligence, big data, innovative software, unmanned aerial vehicles, and effective use of social media (such as crowdsourcing) can be put to use to make cities safer. That said, such technological solutions could create even greater distance between communities and the police, fuelled by fear and suspicion of being remotely 'controlled'. Therefore, technological change needs to go hand in hand with a greater focus on community policing.

Alternative development

Alternative development is becoming part of the mainstream of drug control policy. This was evident from the Outcome Document of the 2016 UNGASS on drugs in which a whole chapter was dedicated to operational recommendations on alternative development and other socio-economic issues.¹⁶⁶

Thus far, alternative development approaches have been largely focused on rural areas, predominantly crop control (or substitution) strategies. Unlike repressive measures and destroying plants, the alternative development approach focuses on development deficits and addresses them. This includes diversifying agricultural production, opening and expanding market access for legal products, promoting access to land titles and rural infrastructure, and improving public services for remote cultivation regions.¹⁶⁷

Since many factors of vulnerability in drug-growing regions and urban drug markets are similar (such as poverty, marginalization, weak governance, violence, and few options for licit livelihoods), why not apply similar approaches to promoting development? To demonstrate the point, and



FIGURE 8 From urban drug markets to urban development

to pull together some of the policy recommendations made in this report, Figure 8 has mimicked the approach taken by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development towards alternative development and applied it to urban environments.

At the moment, for many people living in poor neighbourhoods, organized crime brings benefits rather than just causing harm. Where the licit economy is weak, organized crime is a form of generating alternative yet illegal sources of income. Indeed, it is sometimes the only source of livelihood. As has been pointed out, ‘there is a development paradox at play where the illicit economy may present the best possible development returns for certain communities or for the life chances of individuals.’¹⁶⁸ But this is not a viable and sustainable path for the development of individuals and communities. So what can be done?

Alternative development involves implementing comprehensive strategies aimed at alleviating poverty and strengthening the rule of law, creating accountable, effective and inclusive institutions and improving public services and institutional frameworks. It also involves improving infrastructure and social inclusion and protection. Drawing on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, a priority should be to ‘integrate those communities which are marginalized regions into the economic and political mainstream; as appropriate, such integration should involve supporting access to roads, schools, primary health-care services, electricity and other services and infrastructure.’¹⁶⁹ All of these points apply to urban development as much as rural, alternative development.



An urban farming programme, Brooklyn, New York. © Andrew Lichtenstein/Corbis via Getty Images

Financial support and increased investment is essential. This is a major challenge, not least because of extortion. Yet there can be scope for providing micro-credits, and encouraging entrepreneurship, for example, through small business incubators, impact hubs and fab labs that promote innovation. Again, applying the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, there is scope to combine local knowledge and experience, public-private partnerships and available resources to promote 'a legal market-driven product development approach when applicable, capacity-building, skills training of the involved population, effective management and the entrepreneurial spirit, in order to support the creation of internal and sustainable commercial systems and a viable value chain at the local level'.¹⁷⁰ This will become all the more important – and create new opportunities – as consumers pivot to local and sustainable products as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Projects can also focus on vulnerable individuals, not just communities. In Chicago, the Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI) is focusing on at-risk men in the city's hotspots, and providing them with a job and cognitive behavioural therapy to deal with trauma and avoid confrontations. Although it is too early to evaluate this project (launched in September 2017), early indications are positive.¹⁷¹ In short, many of the methods pioneered in alternative development can help build safer urban communities.



ANTI-VIRAL THERAPY FOR CRIME IN THE CITY



Urban drug markets provide wider warnings for the future. Perhaps, as fiction writer William Gibson says: 'The future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed.' What we see in neglected neighbourhoods could be a taste of what to expect if things go wrong. In the short term, a health crisis triggered by COVID-19 could lead to a fall in employment and living standards and could push communities towards smuggling and other forms of crime to make ends meet.¹⁷² Cities are being plagued by violence, looting and rioting, not least in response to repressive policing. If these concerns are not satisfactorily addressed, there could be further disruption to come. A crisis for most could be an opportunity for criminal groups, who may seek to offer 'protection' to businesses and people, distribute drugs (real and counterfeit, both online and on the streets), facilitate deliveries despite travel restrictions, and provide access to healthcare, and health equipment and medication (particularly anti-viral drugs).

The other danger is that the type of criminal economies witnessed in urban drug markets could become a business model for states – what has been described as captured or mafia states.

But this doesn't need to happen. Lessons learned from dealing with urban drug markets – such as some of those outlined in this paper – can help stop the spread of the virus of violence and strengthen urban immune systems against drugs and crime. This requires leadership, an understanding of both the local conditions and wider (transnational) criminal networks and markets, effective coordination within communities and across different levels of government, and the time and resources to make responses sustainable. It also requires an understanding of the different facets of urban drug markets.

Experience shows the importance of multifaceted, integrated and inclusive approaches to reducing violence and the harm caused by drugs, preventing crime and promoting development. All relevant actors need the opportunity to contribute their ideas and expertise, and once a strategy is in place, they must pull in the same direction. What is needed is not only a whole-of-government approach, but

◀ Residents put up banners as community members gather to discuss gang violence in Manenberg, Cape Town, July 2019. © Reuters/Mike Hutchings

a whole-of-society approach. Thomas Abt has described this as 'partnership-oriented crime prevention'.¹⁷³ Such an approach will require new and sometimes unusual alliances: for example between urban planners, security experts, health workers, social integration and development experts; between civil society, local government and the private sector; and between cities – sharing information about drug markets, criminal markets and trafficking routes, as well as good practices. In the process, urban institutions need to find ways to realistically engage in supporting communities and citizens by building transparent systems of consultation for the implementation of development and security initiatives aimed at achieving higher levels of community safety,¹⁷⁴ and to make such initiatives sustainable.

Resources are also essential. If the movement to defund the police gains momentum, approaches such as those covered in this report can help to replace heavy-handed policing with more community-oriented initiatives to develop safer communities.

In conclusion, since more than half of the world's population now live in urban environments, efforts to address the world drug problem will have to focus at least half of their attention and resources on urban drug markets. The other side of the coin is that efforts (such as SDG 11) to promote sustainable communities will have to address the challenge posed by drugs in cities. In short, instead of working in silos, approaches to tackling crime, and promoting urban security and sustainable communities should be complementary.

As Wennmann has warned, the coming tide of conflict and insecurity in cities, and the increasing recognition that urban crime and violence are a political issue, means that those who are serious about peace and development cannot afford to wait for another two decades – until the time of the next UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat IV) in 2036 or when countries will assess how they delivered on the 2030 Agenda.¹⁷⁵ Local governments, civil society and the private sector need to do more to protect communities affected by urban drug markets. If not, others will.

What we see in neglected neighbourhoods could be a taste of what to expect if things go wrong.

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