

## Helpdesk Research Report

# Policy responses to criminal violence in Latin America and the Caribbean

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### Question

*Mediation efforts between the 'maras' in El Salvador have led to a significant reduction in homicide rates. What other policy responses to gang and criminal violence, including but not limited to formal and informal mediation efforts, exist in Latin America and the Caribbean? What lessons can the donor community learn from them?*

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### 1. Overview

Combatting the threat posed by transnational and domestic criminal organisations<sup>1</sup> has become a critical concern of governments throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Ideas of how to reduce crime and organised violence in this region vary between those who advocate for state-security led approaches and those who argue for approaches that tackle the causes of crime and the factors that incentivise people to engage in risky behaviour (Basombrío & Dammert, 2013). Policy responses in Latin America and the Caribbean have been implemented at a range of levels, from local to regional, and have involved a range of different actors.

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<sup>1</sup> Groups involved in transnational organised crime in Latin America include territorial groups (who maintain control over a geographic area) and drugs trafficking groups. Street gangs, referred to as *maras* in Central America, often comprised of young people are a type of territorial group and have little connection with the transnational drug trade, focussing instead on extortion and local power struggles. See UNODC (2012, 11-13) for more information.

## 2. Lessons and recommendations

The following lessons and recommendations were identified from the literature reviewed:

- Several authors argue that **state-security led approaches** such as the *mano dura* (strong handed) approach in the northern triangle<sup>2</sup> have been ineffective at reducing organised crime:
  - Thousands of youths arrested as part of government crackdowns were wrongly arrested and later released. Furthermore, aggressive roundups have overwhelmed prisons and the criminal justice system in Central America (Meyer and Seelke, 2012).
  - Gangs have adapted and transformed in reaction to *mano dura* policies by becoming more organised and interconnected (Cruz, 2009).
- Several authors recommend more comprehensive and **preventative approaches**:
  - Cunningham et al (2008) state that policies should focus on preventing the causes of violent crime and the factors that provide incentives for young people to commit risky behavior.
  - Meyer and Seelke (2012) suggest that it is important for governments to offer educational and job opportunities to youth who are willing to leave gangs before they are tempted to join more sophisticated criminal organisations.
- Several authors emphasise the importance of **targeting preventative programmes**:
  - Umaña & Ridders (2012) state that organised crime has gendered aspects. Preventative programmes should focus on why young women drop out of school, and the legal rights of women in conflict with the law.
  - Meyer and Seelke (2012) suggest that efforts should focus on strengthening families of at-risk youth.
- Initiatives should involve a broad **range of stakeholders**: The World Bank (2011) suggests an inclusive coalition of agencies and individuals across governments as well as civil society
- Policies and programmes should be based upon **facts and evidence**: Basombrío & Dammert (2013) argue that policymakers in Latin America should examine lessons learned from previous successes and failures and take an evidence-based approach in order to implement effective, efficient, and just public policies in their countries.
- Several authors suggest that **criminal justice reform** is needed in order to tackle organised violence effectively:
  - The World Bank (2011) argues that recent increases in crime and violence in Central America have exacerbated existing institutional weaknesses, such as the lack of inter-institutional coordination, and have created others, such as drug-related corruption. This signals the need for further criminal justice reform.
  - USAID (2006) argues that community policing can be a powerful element in any programme to combat gangs.

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<sup>2</sup> The northern triangle consists of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala

- The prison system is often overlooked and is the weakest link in the criminal justice system (Basombrío & Dammert, 2013)
- The impacts of **gang truces** in Latin America and the Caribbean are as yet inconclusive:
  - In the El Salvador case, homicide rates have dropped but some authors have questioned its impact on other crime indicators (Seelke, 2013).
  - Homicide rates initially declined as the result of a gang truce in Belize. However rates have since increased again causing the government to withdraw support (Fox, 2012).
- A **regional approach** is needed: The World Bank (2011) argues that issues relating to organised crime, particularly in the areas of drug trafficking and firearms, transcend boundaries in Latin America and require a coordinated response.

### 3. Law enforcement and suppression

#### ‘Mano dura’

In the early 2000s, northern triangle governments adopted *mano dura* anti-gang policies. These approaches typically involved incarcerating large numbers of youth for illicit association, and increasing sentences for gang membership and gang-related crimes, which resulted in large round-ups of suspected gang members (Meyer and Seelke, 2012). With regard to the drugs trade in Central America, the emphasis was on harsh sentencing, seizures of drug shipments and on capturing low-level traffickers (Ten Velde, 2012)

These efforts were largely reactive, partly to convey that the state is getting tough on crime, rather than as part of proactive strategies to strengthen citizen security. Punitive approaches were also a reaction to populist demands - in Latin America, security is often a central issue in electoral campaigns. This is also a result of the perceived ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system, together with perceptions of increasing crime, and increased public demands for repressive measures against crime (Basombrío and Dammert, 2013).

El Salvador first implemented its *mano dura* policy in July 2003. It advocated the imprisonment of youths suspected as gang members as young as 12. This was eventually declared unconstitutional by the Salvadorian Supreme Court for violating human rights laws. El Salvador subsequently implemented a *Super Mano Dura* package in 2004, which respected the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but enhanced police search and arrest powers and stiffened penalties for convicted gang members (Jütersonke et al, 2009). Other Central American states followed suite, such as Honduras’s *Cero Tolerancia* in 2003, and Guatemala’s *Plan Escoba* in 2004 (Cruz, 2009; Jütersonke et al, 2009)

#### Militaristic approaches

Although *mano dura* policies have been largely phased out, the northern triangle countries have deployed thousands of troops to help underpaid and under resourced police forces to undertake public security functions (Seelke, 2013). In El Salvador, 8,000 troops are involved in internal security efforts, whilst in Guatemala, fewer than ten per cent of the country’s 9,000 soldiers perform traditional military functions. This has led human rights groups to raise concerns about the ‘re-militarisation’ of some Central

American countries and question the military's ability to respect human rights norms (Meyer and Seelke, 2012).

## Unintended consequences and criticisms of 'mano dura' policies

Whilst early public reaction to *mano dura* policies was positive, the long-term effects have been disappointing. Most youth arrested under *mano dura* provisions were subsequently released for lack of evidence. Salvadorian police estimated that more than 10,000 of 14,000 suspected gang members arrested in 2005 were later released. Aggressive round-ups of suspects have overwhelmed prisons in Central America, with severe overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and staffing shortages. Facilities have been filled beyond their capacity with suspected gang members, many of who have yet to be convicted (Meyer and Seelke, 2012; Seelke, 2013).

Cruz (2009) argues that El Salvador's *mano dura* act put in motion a series of events that transformed Salvadoran gangs. By overpopulating prisons, *mano dura* crackdowns provided opportunities for gang organisation and strengthening. Whilst in prison, youth gangs began to organise themselves into hierarchical structures and gang members who shared the same gang franchise, but who came from different places in the country, established contact. This was facilitated, in part, by the decision of the authorities to separate gangs in detention centres according to their gang membership. As Cruz (2009, 11) states, 'the *mano dura* policies nourished a sort of long-term national gang assembly and facilitated communication and connections among gang members both nationwide as well as internationally'.

In response to *mano dura*, gangs prepared for conflict against the state and its agents. Gang members prepared to face crackdowns by punishing those they suspected of collaborating with state agents or by incorporating more actively into the criminal networks. Furthermore, *maras* adapted their behaviour, becoming less conspicuous and adopting less obvious signs and symbols of gang membership, such as abandoning tattoos (Jütersonke et al, 2009).

Jütersonke et al (2009) argue that *mano dura* policies exacerbated the stigmatisation of gang members, thus preventing their reform and ultimately their meaningful reintegration into society. Additionally, gang persecution led to the violation of the human rights of those arrested. The climate created by *mano dura* made it possible for armed groups to engage in 'social cleansing' against young people suspected of belonging to gangs (Cruz, 2009).

Basombrío and Dammert (2013) argue that incarceration and purely punitive approaches to crime have not been successful. They state that: 'Not one Latin American country has shown evidence that imposing harsher penalties through these *mano dura* policies has reduced crime' (Basombrío & Dammert, 2013, 8). Indeed, the results have been negative in places such as El Salvador, and throughout Latin America the criminal justice system is backlogged. In particular, the often-overlooked prison system is the weakest link in the criminal justice system. Across Latin America, overcrowding, and the large number of prisoners who are held in pre-trial detention, has created a humanitarian crisis..

Basombrío and Dammert (2013, 5) state, that one effect of 'punitive populism' in Latin America is that public policy becomes based on subjective public concern rather than evidence-based analysis. Specialists and experts have become marginalised in the design of anti-crime policies, their place having been taken by victims of crime.

## 4. Preventative and comprehensive approaches

Meyer and Seelke (2012) report that in recent years, governments in Central America have moved, at least on a rhetorical level, toward more comprehensive approaches to dealing with gangs and crime. This is in part, a response to the criticism levelled at *mano dura* policies and evidence of their perverse effects.

There is a consensus amongst experts in Latin America that the key to addressing youth gang violence is a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, rehabilitation and carefully designed suppression strategies (WOLA, 2006). These approaches focus not just on the symptoms of organised violence, but also on the causes of violence and the factors that give young people the incentives to engage in risky and violent behaviour, particularly in urban settings (Cunningham et al, 2008).

Such interventions include a range of activities, ranging from voluntary weapons collection, temporary firearms-carrying restrictions and alcohol prohibitions, to environmental design in slums and targeted health and education initiatives focusing on youth at risk engaging in criminal activity. Whilst these efforts vary in intent and design, such approaches feature an integrated approach to violence prevention, including the involvement of municipal authorities, service providers, state and private security actors, and civil society (Jütersonke et al, 2009).

### Comprehensive violence prevention strategies

All Central American countries have created institutional bodies to design and coordinate crime prevention strategies and have specialised police units engaged in prevention efforts. Some, with support from donors, have begun to encourage municipalities to develop crime prevention plans. However, many have been ad-hoc and insufficiently funded. Furthermore, governments have had even less involvement in rehabilitation programmes for individuals seeking to leave gangs, with most reintegration programmes funded by civil society and non-governmental organisations (Meyer and Seelke, 2012).

Meyer and Seelke (2012) consider Nicaragua's approach to be one of the few comprehensive and sufficiently funded approaches to youth crime prevention in Central America. The police, the parliament and other state institutions have fostered a non-repressive, preventive, and rehabilitation-oriented approach to confronting youth violence in Nicaragua. This includes the approval of the *Code of Childhood and Adolescence in 1998* and the establishment of a *Special Ombudsman's Office for Children and Adolescents in 2000* (Peetz, 2011). Nicaragua's approach also includes a citizen security programme, which employs complementary integrated, multisectoral and participatory initiatives. These include: (1) institutional strengthening, especially of the Interior Ministry; (2) the integration and strengthening of juvenile violence prevention services, including prevention and the municipal level; (3) community policing initiatives; and (4) a public information programme to encourage the inclusion of citizen security in the social agenda (World Bank, 2011).

Peetz (2011) notes how such measures have influenced the overall approach of the police, and have been reflected in the judiciary's dealings with juveniles. However, he also argues that this is largely due to government efforts to show compliance with foreign donor demands, rather than the ideological conviction of legislators. Furthermore, police behaviour against gangs at a local level, is still fundamentally of a repressive nature, with the continuation of repressive crackdowns on youth violence and systematic round ups of adolescents.

Seelke (2013) states that other Latin American countries have developed a variety of programs to deal with their gang problems. In Panama, the Ministry of Social Development, in coordination with other

government entities and several NGOs, administers gang prevention programs, as well as a program to provide job training and rehabilitation services to former gang members. Less is known about Costa Rica's gang prevention efforts, but the country has generally tended towards a preventive and rehabilitation-oriented approach.

## **Prevention of youth violence**

Cunningham et al (2008) argue that risky behaviour, including violence, begins between the ages of 12 to 24. Therefore, youth deserve special attention when it comes to preventing violent and organised crime. The factors that incentivise risky and violent behaviour in young people include: leaving school early; inadequate education; early labour force entry; joblessness; risky sexual behaviour; and substance abuse. Further, the engagement of young people in crime and violence specifically is related to: learning violent behaviour from parents and peers; laws and norms, which encourage adults to use younger people in criminal tasks; and mental health issues.

Cunningham et al (2008, 15-16) state that policies and programmes targeting at-risk youth should include the following core elements: (1) initiatives aimed at early childhood development for children from poor households; (2) a focus on secondary school completion; (3) school-based prevention and remediation programmes, including programmes to train teachers in identifying students' health and education deficiencies early; (4) the use of media to promote messages aimed at reducing risky sexual behaviour, violence and substance abuse; (5) improved caregiving, including mentoring programmes that teach parenting skills; and (6) monitoring indicators to track progress.

Cunningham et al (2008, 17-18) add that 'second-chance programmes' should be part of the policy portfolio. Although few programme evaluations exist, experts have identified a number of promising programmes within Latin America and the Caribbean. These include programmes that focus on: (1) education equivalency and lifelong learning, to combat secondary school drop-outs; (2) vocational training for at-risk youth; (3) cash transfers to households linked to school attendance; (4) supervised after school programmes and youth service activities; (5) mentoring; (6) youth employment services; (7) life-skills training, including training on cognitive and social skills; and (8) specific support to youth entrepreneurs.

## **Examples of comprehensive and preventative initiatives**

Research based knowledge about the effectiveness of violence prevention programmes is limited (WOLA, 2006). However, a number of programmes are mentioned in the literature and can be considered as prominent examples of preventative approaches to crime and violence in Latin America.

### ***APREDE (Alianza para la Prevención del Delito)***

The *Alianza para la Prevención del Delito* (The Association for the Prevention of Crime) is an independent NGO in Guatemala, which has developed a municipal level model for youth delinquency and prevention. It operates three youth centres. The group's primary activities include: (1) popular education for youth who are unable to attend traditional schools; (2) life-skills development through sports and arts; (3) skills training in vocational skills; (4) psycho-social assistance to children and youth; (5) job search support; and (6) the development of crime prevention strategies and campaigns in concert with civil society, and public and private sector organisations (USAID, 2006; WOLA, 2006; World Bank, 2011).

### ***JHAJA (Jóvenes Hondureños Adelante, Juntos Avancemos)***

JHAJA (Young Hondurans Together Advance) is an NGO in San Pedro Sula that helps rehabilitate former gang members and reintegrate them into society through job training and placements. It focuses on five phases: (1) Investigative and networking - providing insights of the situation and the geographic environment; (2) Engagement and reconciliation of gang-related conflict - showing gang leaders and members that the program is not a threat and takes into account the gang code of honour; (3) Individual and group programs - providing psychological support, vocational training, the identification of job opportunities, and assistance in exploring family conflicts and drug rehabilitation; (4) Follow-up with families - involving families and attempting to reconcile conflicts; and (5) social reintegration, which pulls all of the phases together, resulting in reconciliation, regained trust by gang members and the community, and the reintegration of gang members into society (USAID 2006; WOLA 2006).

### ***Viva Rio***

Viva Rio is an example of a comprehensive and multi-sectoral programme. It focuses on preventing urban youth crime and manages numerous projects in various *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. Their work includes disarmament, police training on human rights and conflict mediation, community policing, community development, job training, and counseling, among others (WOLA, 2006).

## **Community based policing**

Community policing is one tool that can be used within a broader set of preventative strategies to address street crime and gangs. The World Bank (2011) argue that community policing is more responsive and accountable to local communities, and can lead to increased trust between communities and police forces, higher rates of crime reporting, and a reduction in police force abuses. Experiments of this type in Latin America have led to reductions in crime and violence, and improvements in citizens' perceptions of security. Community policing initiatives have several common elements, including: (1) public meetings and forums to identify problems and priorities; (2) police-sponsored neighbourhood watches; (3) crime education programmes for the public; (4) small local police stations in targeted neighbourhoods; (5) civilian volunteer liaison with community police officers; (6) the creation of education and recreational spaces for youth; (7) increased educational requirements for police forces; and (8) the reassignment of certain management tasks from police to civilian personnel (World Bank, 2011).

Efforts in Rio de Janeiro provide an example of community policing in the context of high crime rates. The *Grupamento de Policiamento em Áreas Especiais* (Police Unit for Special Areas) was established to patrol high-risk areas with high homicide rates. The units had an impressive effect in bringing together police and communities. However, they had to confront powerful drug-trafficking networks, and many of the police volunteers were not accustomed to these sorts of operations. In contrast, the current *Unidades de Policia Pacificadora* (Police Pacification Units) represent a different approach. The units initially begin patrolling into the favelas, where they confront and attempt to neutralise drug networks and suppress other criminal activities. Next, new graduates of the police academy who have received training in community policing are stationed in the favelas and assisted through social services and other support programmes. This permits effective engagement with community members and promotes a less repressive image of the police (World Bank, 2012).

International evidence on whether and how community policing affects crime reduction is mixed. However, some studies have shown that it increases the public's perception of safety as well as the image

of the police, which are both essential elements in addressing the underlying causes of youth violence (Cunningham et al, 2008).

## **The impacts of preventative and comprehensive policies**

Basombrío and Dammert (2013) state that, preventative policies are not sufficiently supported with the degree of political and budgetary support that they deserve. Furthermore, no Latin American country has yet implemented preventative policies on a systematic enough basis to allow an analysis of their effectiveness. Jütersonke et al (2009) argue that preventative and comprehensive measures have yet to prove themselves in practice in Central America. For example, in Nicaragua, the government's promotion of such activities seems to be principally aimed at appeasing potential foreign donors. In practice, government action against violent crime remains suppressive in nature.

Meyer and Seelke (2012) state that Central American governments have previously cited budgetary limitations as a major factor impeding the implementation of more extensive prevention and rehabilitation programmes. There are signs that this trend is changing: in 2010 El Salvador increased its funding for prevention programmes to 14 per cent on the Ministry of Security's budget, an increase from an historic average of just one per cent (Meyer and Seelke, 2012). Cunningham et al (2008) contend that violent and risky behaviour by young people imposes significant costs on individuals and society. Preventing risky behaviours eliminates social costs by increasing human capital and productive capacities, therefore freeing up public resources for other initiatives and increasing growth.

Most preventative activities have failed to develop robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, meaning that there is little empirical evidence that these approaches are achieving major change (Cunningham et al, 2008). WOLA (2006) states that whilst there have been few large-scale evaluations of prevention of youth gang violence programmes, a review of successful programmes indicates some commonalities in how these programmes are designed implemented and reviewed. The most successful programmes: (1) clearly define the problem and gather accurate information on youth and the community at large, with particular attention on identifying risk factors facing youth; (2) create programmes to specifically target these risk factors; (3) implement the programme with care to ensure proper management; and (3) monitor the programme and analyse the results.

## **5. Mediation, pacts and gang truces**

Basombrío and Dammert (2013) state that, while numerous historical precedents for concluding pacts with criminal organisations exist, this is still an emerging issue in Latin America. There also appears to be little systematic analysis of their impacts. However, a number of cases from the region illustrate possible outcomes:

### **The El Salvador 'mara' truce**

Efforts in El Salvador to broker a truce between the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and 18<sup>th</sup> Street (M-18) gangs have been praised - including by the Organisation for American States (OAS), the United Nations (UN), and human rights groups. The Salvadoran government claims that, since 2011 when the truce was initiated, homicide rates have dramatically reduced from an average of 14 per day to 5.5 per day (Seelke, 2013).

However, the approach is not without criticism.<sup>3</sup> Some have expressed reservations about the gangs' commitment to ending crimes. Others have underlined that gang-on-gang homicide rates have declined, but levels of extortion and other violent crimes remain high. Some analysts maintain that recognising gangs as legitimate political actors carries risks, and should negotiations collapse, gangs could emerge even more powerful and organised. The US Ambassador to El Salvador has reportedly recognised that the truce has reduced crime, but has also reiterated that policies must address root causes of crime in order to be effective and for any reduction in crime to be sustainable (Seelke, 2013).

## **Belize gang truce**

Fox (2012) notes that despite its initial success in reducing violence, a gang truce in Belize City appears to be under strain due to escalating violence between groups. The Belize government brokered a truce among 13 local gangs in September 2011 in exchange for meeting gang members' demands for jobs. This has involved park rehabilitation and cleanups, amongst other jobs (Fox, 2012). The programme caused controversy, with critics insisting that there were more deserving impacts for funds, and better social programmes that could have a longer lasting impact (McDermott, 2012)

As a result of the truce, murders declined through to March 2012, but unraveled again in April 2012 after a spate of reprisal killings. That month the country experienced its highest monthly murder rate in two years (Seelke, 2013). The government subsequently removed its financial support for the truce in December 2012 as Belize recorded a record number of murders in 2012, up a reported 16 per cent from 2011 (Seelke, 2013).

Fox (2012) argues that it is unclear what initiated the outbreak of violence in April 2012. Furthermore, the rapid disintegration of the truce highlights the difficulties in maintaining agreements with criminal groups in countries that are of strategic importance to drug traffickers. McDermott (2012) reports that the truce may have strengthened some of the gangs, which better organized themselves to take advantage of government subsidies.

## **Sao Paulo truce with the First Capital Command (PCC)**

The PCC is a prison-based gang in São Paulo, which some argue is the strongest criminal organisation in Brazil (Brooks, 2012). It was initially formed in 1993 with the objective of pressuring the authorities to improve prison conditions. However, its members soon began using their power inside the prisons to direct drug-dealing and extortion operations on the outside. Efforts to transfer high-ranking imprisoned members of the gang to distant prisons where they would be unable to provide orders to gang members by mobile phone enraged the gang in 2006. Five days of violence left at least 175 dead, including police officers, drug traffickers and innocent civilians. After several months of violence, an alleged informal truce between the government and the PCC slowed the transfers, and led to a significant reduction in violence (Jütersonke et al, 2009; Brooks, 2012).

In 2012, this tenuous truce appeared to be over, with a surge in killings in São Paulo. In the six months leading up to November 2012, a series of police raids killed dozens of suspected gang members, while a number of off-duty police officers were executed by the PCC. Authorities subsequently renewed efforts to transfer PCC leaders to prisons outside of São Paulo state. Many experts believe that violence will

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<sup>3</sup> Several expert advisors contacted during the course of compiling this report stated that the results of the gang truce are inconclusive as yet.

escalate if state authorities continue their hard line approach, and there is a perception that political leaders are turning a blind eye to excessive force and killings carried out by police officers against suspected gang members (Brooks, 2012).

## **Jamaica Peace Management Initiative (PMI)**

The PMI is the only Jamaican government-funded initiative that interacts directly with gang members, and one of the few that targets community violence. Established in 2002, its remit is to diffuse community violence, most of which is perpetrated by gangs. The PMI represented the first time that the government targeted community conflicts with an explicitly non-violent approach, with extensive civil society involvement. The PMI plays a major role in mediation, in brokering peace treaties between gangs, but also provides basic outreach, in the form of counseling and leadership training for gang members. In addition, it aims to foster social development through training, sports programmes, and income-generating assistance. Central to the PMI is the ability of gangs to be able to work independently to security forces, and the sensitivity of the programme to the mistrust between inner-city communities and state security forces (Leslie, 2010).

The PMI has been credited with stopping gang wars in August Town, Browns Town and Mountain View. Furthermore, they are viewed by the different sections of the communities as having a neutral face and thus trusted to initiate dialogue with gang members (McClellan & Blake Lobban, 2009).

McClellan & Blake Lobban (2009, 47) state that: 'A key challenge that PMI faces is a lack of understanding on the part of many stakeholders of the importance of engaging warring factions and addressing their needs and concerns'. Consequently, some have questioned the ethical basis for 'giving resources to gunmen'.

## **6. Regional initiatives**

Latin American and Caribbean states have launched several forms of cross-border cooperation in order to deal with transnational gangs. Muggah (2011) argues that many of these regional responses are repressive in nature, allowing governments to use transnational gangs as scapegoats and to avoid action on more complex problems such as corruption, exclusion, inequality and the lack of job creation. For example, by early 2004, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua agreed to lift legal barriers to the cross-country prosecution of gang members. In 2005, El Salvador and Guatemala established a joint security force to patrol gang activity along their common border. Central American states have also sought to involve the US, who has assumed an assertive role in the region. The US supports regional mechanisms such as the OAS and The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in strengthening their domestic and bilateral military, policing, judicial, customs and immigration capacities. US-led policy responses in the region are state-security orientated, such as the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) (Muggah, 2011).

### **Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)**

Through CARSI, the US provides partner nations with equipment, technical assistance, and training. CARSI-funded activities also support Central American law enforcement and justice sector institutions, identifying deficiencies and building their capacities to ensure citizen safety and security. In addition, CARSI supports prevention efforts that seek to reduce drug demand and provide at-risk youth with

educational, vocational, and recreational opportunities (Meyer and Seelke, 2012).

Ten Velde (2012) argues that while the stated focus of CARSI is quite broad, in terms of concrete assistance the emphasis is on providing equipment, security and law enforcement training and technical support. This complements existing strategies in the northern triangle, with regard to drug interdiction operations and military law enforcement efforts. Furthermore, There are concerns that resources provided through CARSI help governments to maintain *mano dura* and militarisation policies.

## Regional preventative approaches

The World Bank (2011) argues that issues relating to organised crime, particularly in the areas of drug trafficking and firearms, transcend boundaries in Latin America and require a coordinated response. In recognition of this, a number of comprehensive, regional approaches are emerging from the OAS, the World Bank, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Muggah, 2011). Examples of initiatives include (Rodgers et al, 2009):

- OAS preventative interventions such as youth education, employment, health and juvenile justice services
- The World Bank's Small Grant Programme for Violence Prevention (SGVP) (launched in 2005), supports municipal level initiatives that advance community-level responses to weapons circulation and violence. In 2006, 11 projects were initiated in Honduras and Nicaragua
- The Inter-American Development Bank has supported large-scale citizen security and crime prevention projects in Latin America and the Caribbean since the late 1990s
- The UNDP supports small arms control, armed violence reduction and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration projects in Central America in concert with the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA).

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## Key websites

- Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars:  
<http://www.wilsoncenter.org/>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime:  
<http://www.unodc.org/>
- The World Bank – Latin America and Caribbean:  
<http://go.worldbank.org/F7T4DTVE20>
- The Washington Office on Latin America:  
<http://www.wola.org/>

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