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COMBINING STATE AND COMMUNITY- LED APPROACHES: THE FUTURE FOR CRIME PREVENTION IN NIGERIA



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This brief was developed based on the Comparative Evidence Paper [Community-Based Crime Prevention Practices in El Salvador and Nigeria: Understanding Communities' Willingness to Act](#). That document was authored by an inter-regional team of researchers, based on regional evidence, as well as original data collection and analysis on a particular research topic. All ELLA publications can be found in the [programme website](#).



Combining State and Community-led Approaches: The Future for Crime Prevention in Nigeria

Highlights

High levels of willingness to act and social ties are common features of Community-based Crime Prevention (CBCP) practices in Nigeria.

However, it may be impossible for Nigerian communities to deploy these resources if crime severity rises sharply and overwhelms their capacity to handle the situation.

Therefore, the future of effective CBCP in Nigeria could be a system that combines community-driven and state-led crime prevention approaches.

Summary

Both El Salvador and Nigeria practise community-based crime prevention, but in different contexts. The two countries present a wide variation in structure and outcomes of these Community-based Crime Prevention (CBCP) projects and practices. This Policy Brief uses studies by the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and FundaUngo, El Salvador to explain how contextual variables such as trust, willingness to act together and social ties define, influence and condition CBCP outcomes in the two countries in their efforts to tackle crime.

The *strength of social ties* explains why communities in Nigeria are willing to act collectively, while communities in El Salvador rely on strong state presence in the face of severe crime situations. However, willingness to act together does not translate to significant reduction in perception of insecurity in Nigeria.

Where there is a high level of trust in crime prevention institutions amidst weak social ties, state-led crime prevention initiatives may provide a better option as evident in El Salvador. Therefore, the future of crime prevention in Nigeria could also be a system that combines community-driven and state-led approaches to crime prevention.

Introduction

Rising crimes rates in Africa and Latin America (UNODC 2013) and the inability of state institutions to provide adequate security for their citizens (Baker, 2002) constitute the major reasons behind the adoption of non-state approaches to crime prevention (Goddard and Headley 2015). These include community-based crime prevention (CBCP) projects and practices which form the focus of this study. As can be expected, there is wide variation in the structure and outcomes of CBCP projects and practices because they have been implemented in different social, political and cultural realities, including contexts where the severity of crime varies.

Where crime is severe, it might be expected that it overpowers the resources and capacities of communities to respond. Yet, existing literature shows that in some communities members continue to act together to prevent or reduce crime even under these conditions. Why, then, are some communities able to withstand high rates of crime and others are not? Given that CBCP operates in contexts that are far from uniform, what can be learnt in terms of the factors that explain their success or failure?



The University of Ibadan and FundaUngo sought to answer this question through a comparative analysis of communities located in severe crime zones in El Salvador and Nigeria. These two countries demonstrate some of the highest crime rates in Africa and Latin America and their governments are actively seeking to adopt or expand community-based crime prevention practices. We investigated the interplay between social ties and willingness to act as they define, explain and condition CBCP efforts in both countries.

Methodology

The study was conducted in fourteen communities; 7 with high levels of insecurity (4 in El Salvador and 3 in Nigeria) and 7 with low levels of insecurity (4 in El Salvador and 3 in Nigeria). In all, 560 copies of a survey questionnaire were administered in the two countries; 280 in communities with high levels and 280 in communities with low levels of insecurity. In-depth analysis focused on three dependent variables - trust, willingness to act and perception of insecurity - as well as three independent variables, namely perception of crime severity, social ties and state response to crime.

Evidence, Results and Conclusions

Though levels of perceived crime and trust are high in both countries, willingness to act together and social ties are higher in Nigeria than in El Salvador. Strong state presence in El Salvador partly explains the success of community-based crime prevention, while strong community coordination explains success in Nigeria. Communities in Nigeria deploy their collective action, social ties, trust and civic participation to prevent and control crimes. Importantly, Nigerian communities with strong social ties withstand severe crime better than those without such ties.

“El Salvadorian communities demonstrate higher levels of trust in crime prevention institutions when compared to their Nigerian counterparts...who demonstrate a much lower level of trust towards the police.”

The communities in both countries recorded high levels of insecurity relating to conditions such as fight between gangs, street loitering, sale of illegal drugs, shootings and robbery at home. However, in general, the Nigerian communities perceived higher levels of insecurity than did the El Salvadorian communities.

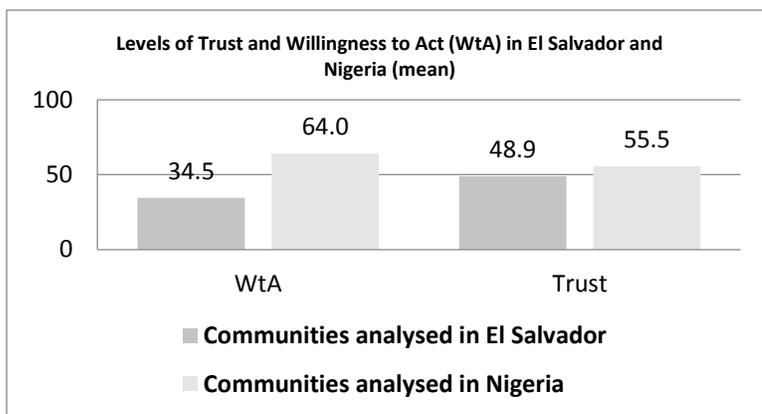
In general, respondents from communities in both countries reported fairly similar levels of trust in their neighbours. Their responses on willingness to act, however, show a significant difference. The Willingness to act together (WtA) in Nigeria is higher (64.4%) than in El Salvador (34.5%). It follows that the relationship between trust and willingness to act in the two countries confirms the argument of scholars that trust may not be enough to ensure that inhabitants act together to achieve a common goal.



Despite higher perceived severity of crime in Nigeria than El Salvador Nigerian residents demonstrate, on average, a greater willingness to contribute to the community and help their neighbours. This confirms that social interactions can rise when community members perceive an increase in the incidence and severity of crime in their neighbourhood.

Social ties are much higher in Nigeria when compared to El Salvador. In relation to all types of association and institution, frequency of attendance in Nigeria is higher.

Furthermore, while the level of confidence towards crime prevention institutions is comparable in El Salvador, in Nigeria, residents demonstrate a much lower level of trust towards the police.



There is high level of willingness to act together in preventing crime in Nigerian communities. This is why despite high perception of crime severity in both countries, few Nigerians, compared to El Salvadorians, modified their behaviour for fear of crime. In other words, more El Salvadorians than Nigerians avoided participating in public events, felt the need to change their neighbourhood or community, avoided going out at night and stopped visiting relatives and friends.

The study concludes that state actors in Nigeria should seek to effectively complement on-going CBCP efforts. The Nigerian government also needs to learn from El Salvador, the structure and operation of state actors in crime prevention.

Recommendations for Effective and Legitimate Community-based Crime Prevention

- a. Community-based crime prevention and state response to crime are constrained by certain attributes found amongst communities. Where there are strong social ties but low trust in crime prevention institutions, community-led crime prevention initiatives may be effective in addressing the problem of crime. Therefore, community attributes such as level of trust, willingness to act together and social ties should be considered when deciding which approach to community crime prevention to adopt.
- b. High levels of willingness to act, social ties and civic participation are common features of CBCP in Nigeria. However, it may be impossible for communities to deploy these resources if crime severity rises sharply and overwhelms their capacity to handle the situation. Therefore, state capacity to prevent crime should be proactively enhanced to forestall this possible occurrence and to maintain the effectiveness of the CBCP



practices. This process should be based on an understanding of the limited capacity of the community to solely confront severe crime.

- c. The future of crime prevention in Nigeria could be a system that integrates community and state-led strengths. Nigeria should consider adopting community-based national crime prevention projects as adopted in El Salvador. High level of trust in community security initiatives will provide the structure for the national crime prevention projects.

References and useful resources

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