

**PEACE  
IN OUR CITIES**



# **Peace in Our Cities in a Time of Pandemic:**

## **Preventing violence in informal settlements in the age of COVID-19**



This research brief is part of the FCDO-funded project 'Peace in Our Cities at a Time of Pandemic' led by Impact:Peace, Kroc Institute of Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego.

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## PEACE IN OUR CITIES

The Peace in Our Cities platform was launched on International Day of Peace in September 2019 out of an urgent demand to reverse trends of urban violence around the world. Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) brings together the political leadership of Mayors, local and international peacebuilders, the imperatives of the Sustainable Development Goals, and a bold assertion that we have the tools and knowledge to build peace and save lives in urban areas. With seventeen cities and more than two dozen organizing partners signed on to date, PiOC represents over 20 million people globally. Working together through evidence-based approaches, PiOC is committed to achieving a 50% reduction in urban violence by 2030.

Peace in Our Cities is co-facilitated by three organizations: Impact:Peace, Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego; +Peace Coalition; Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Center on International Cooperation at New York University. Find out more about Peace in Our Cities: [www.sdg16.plus/peaceinourcities](http://www.sdg16.plus/peaceinourcities)



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# Preventing Violence in Informal Settlements in the Age of COVID-19

This briefing makes recommendations for preventing violence in informal settlements in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on violence that results from food insecurity. It describes the problem, reviews case studies of effective violence prevention efforts, and presents lessons learned from the successful cases. The briefing aims to assist mayors and civil society organizations (CSOs) as they collaborate to address urban violence. The research was conceptualized by members of Peace in Our Cities — a network of 18 cities and over two dozen organizing partners from around the world that aims to decrease urban violence by 50 percent by 2030. It was directed and overseen by Impact:Peace at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego.

## I. What's the problem?

One billion people live in informal settlements, or slums. By 2050, this number could increase to three billion.<sup>1</sup> Informal settlements are often characterized by weak provision of public services, heightened levels of poverty, low levels of trust in the authorities, and, in some cases, high rates of crime and violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit many informal settlements hard. Cramped living conditions, inadequate sanitation and ventilation of dwellings, and densely packed populations provide a breeding ground for viruses.<sup>2</sup> That many slum residents are young offers protection against the worst health impacts of the disease, but the economic impacts promise to be severe. The World Bank has predicted the worst global recession in 80 years,<sup>3</sup> and informal settlements around the world are already experiencing mass job losses and food shortages.

### Urban violence

Half a million people worldwide die violent deaths each year, and millions more are injured and left traumatized.<sup>4</sup> People in urban areas are especially worried about violence, and their fear impacts their economic activity. Data from Nairobi, Kenya, show that half of the city's residents worry very often about crime, while in urban Nigeria 90 percent fear being killed by criminals.<sup>5</sup> In a survey in South Africa, one-quarter of respondents said that the fear of crime deters them from setting up businesses.<sup>6</sup> Intimate-partner violence has been found to cost countries at least one percent of GDP via lost productivity and medical costs, while some studies show that the total cost of violence to the worst-affected Latin American countries equates to 25 percent of gross domestic product.<sup>7</sup>

COVID-19 may exacerbate the risks of urban violence, including in informal settlements. Inequality and social exclusion are proven drivers of violent conflict,<sup>8</sup> and if the pandemic leads to those living in informal settlements falling further behind the rest of society — including with regard to their access to food — motivations for violent action may intensify. A pre-COVID study of informal settlements in Patna, India, found that poor living conditions were a key factor behind conflicts and violence,<sup>9</sup> while a survey in urban South Africa revealed that the unemployed were significantly more tolerant of murder and domestic violence than were those who had jobs.<sup>10</sup>

Inequality *within* informal settlements also poses risks. Many settlements are divided along ethnic lines, for example, and favoritism — or perceived favoritism — in the provision of food and other

services during the pandemic is likely to increase friction between groups. Such friction, particularly if accompanied by distrust of the security services, can provide opportunities for gangs or divisive politicians to foment violent conflict, potentially triggering vicious spirals whereby violence renders it harder still to distribute food and healthcare, allowing the coronavirus further scope to spread.<sup>11</sup>

Ten months into the pandemic, there have already been a number of outbreaks of violence in urban settings as a result of food shortages and increased poverty, including the following:

- A stampede in Nairobi's Kibera slum injured dozens as residents mobbed a food aid distribution point.<sup>12</sup>
- Protests in Manila in the Philippines over the lack of access to food have turned violent, leading to multiple arrests.<sup>13</sup>
- Grocery stores in informal settlements in South Africa have been looted during anti-lockdown protests.<sup>14</sup>
- In March 2020, thousands of informal sector workers in El Salvador were dispersed by police using pepper spray as they queued up for government subsidies during lockdown.<sup>15</sup>
- Those who have been economically affected by the virus were found to be significantly more likely to take part in the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States than those who have not.<sup>16</sup> While the vast majority of protests have been peaceful, a small percentage have led to violence by the authorities and/or protesters.<sup>17</sup>

## Food insecurity

In recent years, steep rises in the prices of staple foods have sparked protests and violence in informal settlements and other urban districts in countries such as Sudan, Burkina Faso and Venezuela. Increased food insecurity resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic also poses risks of increased violence.

Infections and virus containment measures have left farms unattended, food transportation systems disrupted, and wholesale and retail markets closed.<sup>18</sup> Rising unemployment has reduced purchasing power, particularly of the least affluent. If supply squeezes lead to food price rises, basic items will be out of reach for millions of people.

In the early stages of the pandemic, international food prices remained steady, in large part due to strong harvests of staple crops in 2020.<sup>19</sup> In recent months, however, indications have been less positive. International prices of wheat and maize declined between March and June 2020, but by November they had climbed to a level higher than in November 2019.<sup>20</sup> A study in 136 countries found that in 118 of them the prices of common food items had increased between mid-February and April 2020.<sup>21</sup>

Price increases are beginning to take a toll on individuals and families. In 30 informal settlements in Lagos, Nigeria, 78 percent of survey respondents reported that they had been unable to meet basic needs since the pandemic hit. Eighty-five percent reported that government support had not reached them.<sup>22</sup> Surveys in the United States, India, South Africa and Myanmar found significant increases in the proportion of individuals facing food insecurity.<sup>23</sup> The World Food Program has warned that the number of people facing acute food insecurity could double by the end of 2020.<sup>24</sup>



## II. How to prevent violence

Preventing COVID-19 from sparking violence in informal settlements will require a multi-pronged approach. Mobilizing the security sector, public health and justice professionals and communities themselves to avert violence will be pivotal, as will securing food supplies to informal settlements.

### Direct Violence Prevention

#### *Alternatives for young people*

Assisting young people in informal settlements to engage in productive activities can help remove their incentives to engage in violence.

A striking example of using the expansion of services for young people to drive down violence in informal settlements comes from Medellín, Colombia, which was once one of the world's most violent cities. Beginning in the early 2000s, the city government collaborated with the private sector and a public services company to invest in education, health services and community policing in slums that had been taken over by drug traffickers. Rehabilitation of urban spaces provided new employment opportunities to young people, while community involvement in urban planning increased local ownership. The city's homicide rate fell from 381 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1991 to 20 per 100,000 in 2016.<sup>25</sup>

The *Luta Pela Paz (Fight for Peace)* program, which began in informal settlements in Brazil and has been rolled out in multiple countries, combines boxing and martial arts for young people with career advice, education and professional training, often delivered by peers.<sup>26</sup> In evaluations in informal settlements in Rio de Janeiro, more than 80 percent of participants said they had stopped "getting into trouble on the streets" as a result of the program, while more than 60 percent said they were less likely to commit crimes.<sup>27</sup>

Those working to prevent violence in slums can also draw lessons from successful programs that assist vulnerable or excluded communities in cities as a whole. The Community Safety Strategy developed by the city of Toronto, Canada, includes a Jobs for Youth component whereby CSOs can access government funding for summer employment projects for youth in vulnerable neighborhoods. CSOs and community members who come up with ideas for safety-related projects can apply to a Youth Challenge Fund for help in implementing them. Support is also provided to community-based organizations that deliver counseling, anger management and other violence prevention training to young people in at-risk parts of the city.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Public health interventions*

Public health approaches show promise for preventing violence in informal settlements, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disease surveillance is a key public health tool, and similar methods can be used to provide an early warning of food insecurity and violence. The Hunger Vital Sign is a two-question food insecurity screening tool used in healthcare settings in the United States for early identification of food insecurity.<sup>29</sup> Beyond its use to refer at-risk individuals to appropriate services, the tool could also be used to help municipal governments pinpoint food insecurity hotspots, to which they could then quickly direct resources.<sup>30</sup>

Collecting accurate data on violence is similarly important. Municipal Crime and Violence Observatories in Latin America and the Caribbean help detect incipient violence via collaboration between health, criminal justice and other sectors, which share data from courts, police stations, hospitals, mortuaries and population surveys. In Colombia the observatories have been found to help reduce homicide rates.<sup>31</sup>

Amending local by-laws governing the use of alcohol and firearms is a proven means of preventing violence in urban areas, including in the informal settlements that comprise the greater part of many cities in developing countries.<sup>32</sup> South Africa banned the sale of alcohol during its COVID-19 lockdown, and rates of violent crime plummeted.<sup>33</sup> In the informal settlement of Diadema in São Paulo, Brazil, prohibition of alcohol sales after 11 p.m. and monitoring of alcohol vendors were combined with infrastructure improvements such as street lighting and security cameras, the establishment of mediation centers for peaceful resolution of conflicts, and drug prevention education and apprenticeship schemes for youth. The city's homicide rate halved in two years.<sup>34</sup>

Behavior change is a further public health intervention that can be applied to violence prevention. The Cure Violence program works in a number of cities around the world, including in informal settlements, to tackle gun violence.<sup>35</sup> It uses a disease control approach of interrupting community transmission, preventing diffusion in the community, and changing harmful norms. The program relies on violence interrupters who themselves are high-risk individuals to help at-risk young people prevent and mediate conflicts and change their and their communities' attitudes to violence, while also facilitating provision of services such as drug treatment and employment support. Evaluations have found significant reductions in the acceptability of violence as a means to resolve disputes as well as declines in violence in affected areas of 20-70 percent.<sup>36</sup>

Within informal settlements, women are at higher risk of experiencing certain forms of violence. Tackling gender-based violence not only improves women's quality of life; it also reduces other forms of violence. Individuals who have witnessed intimate-partner violence in their homes as children are more likely to perpetrate violent acts as adults.<sup>37</sup> In crisis settings in particular, men who cannot fulfill their traditional perceived gender roles of provider and protector of their families may be vulnerable to resorting to violence to reassert their masculinity.<sup>38</sup> Tailored violence prevention efforts help improve women's participation in social and economic activities, while also dampening the culture of violence in settlements as a whole:

- A project in south-western Nigeria reduced physical and sexual violence against female street hawkers. Educational materials and training sessions were delivered to hawkers, their families and friends, and police and judicial officers. The project helped raise awareness of the problem, strengthen hawkers' assertiveness, and increase reporting rates.<sup>39</sup>
- The SASA! program in Kampala, Uganda, trains community leaders, volunteer community activists, CSOs, police officers and healthcare providers in new ways to think about gender-related power imbalances. The community activists and CSOs cascade what they have learned to people in the city's informal settlements. A randomized, controlled trial of the intervention found a 52 percent decline in intimate-partner violence in participating communities, as well as decreased social acceptability of violence.<sup>40</sup>
- Mayors and CSOs can use the media to reach informal settlements with nonviolent messaging. South Africa's Soul City project used television, radio and leaflets to inform communities about domestic violence. The television and radio channels in particular reached large proportions of the intended audiences and led to greater awareness of support services as well as reductions in gender-inequitable attitudes.<sup>41</sup>

Where it has been impossible to prevent violence, treatment for those affected is critical to reducing its impacts. For instance, counseling and therapy services for children and women have been found to reduce the psychological and social impacts of a violent incident.<sup>42</sup> Providing shelter to domestic victims is particularly important during lockdowns, which both increase the risk of such abuse and make it more difficult to escape. In Bangladesh, Namibia and Thailand, for example, one-stop crisis centers offer a range of health, social and psychological services to victims of child abuse and intimate-partner violence.<sup>43</sup> Where a lack of space or facilities prevents such services from being established in informal settlements, outreach will be needed from shelters in formal districts.

### *Policing interventions*

As the 2020 protests in Nigeria and the United States demonstrate, heavy-handed policing often increases rather than reduces violence. Worldwide, one-third of people believe the police are corrupt,<sup>44</sup> and mistrust of the police is an important driver of violence and extremism.<sup>45</sup> The trust deficit is often greater in informal settlements, which have a history of being either ignored or discriminated against by police.

The past two decades have seen a number of innovations that enhance the role of the police in preventing urban violence. Most of them posit policing not as the only solution to violence reduction but as part of a broader, multi-sectoral approach.

Working with — rather than against — communities is key to improving police effectiveness. Police should work with community leaders, CSOs and citizen volunteers on surveillance, upgrading the physical environment, designing new laws, resolving conflicts, and rehabilitating offenders:

- In the late 1990s, the average homicide rate in São Paulo’s Jardim Angela informal settlements was 111 per 100,000 population. A network of CSOs came together with the police and the municipality to implement community-based interventions including rebuilding derelict public spaces, surveillance of crime and violence, and support to domestic violence survivors, recently incarcerated children, and alcohol and drug abusers. By 2005, the homicide rate in the city had fallen by more than three-quarters.<sup>46</sup>
- In the Khayelitsha informal settlement in Cape Town, South Africa, community centers called “Active Boxes” have been set up in places where violence and crime once proliferated. The centers are run by resident groups and guarded around the clock by volunteer patrols. They host activities including markets, sports centers, creches and youth clubs, with the aim of replacing criminal activities in an area with more constructive pursuits. Active Boxes have contributed to a one-third decline in the murder rate in the settlement.<sup>47</sup>
- In Tanzania, community members in low-income areas receive training from the police so that they may carry out duties including night patrols, acting as first responders in emergencies, and reporting on crime and violence to a community-led security committee. In the city of Mwanza, where 75 percent of residents live in informal settlements,<sup>48</sup> this model of community policing, known as *ulinzi shirikishi*, has improved perceptions of neighborhood safety and reduced crime.<sup>49</sup>
- Lagos, Nigeria, where more than 60 percent of the population lives in informal settlements, achieved dramatic declines in violent crime between 2007 and 2010. The city’s multi-pronged approach included training to shift police attitudes towards community rather than regime protection; the creation of conflict management bodies in communities, including informal settlements; consistent dialogue between the municipality and citizens; and social development initiatives such as job creation programs and the upgrading of healthcare and

transportation infrastructure. The approach was funded by voluntary donations from the private sector, the state government and community members.<sup>50</sup> (The recent protests in Nigeria against police violence are an indicator that such efforts need to be maintained.)

### *Justice sector interventions*

Justice actors can also play a vital role in preventing violence. In most of the world's informal settlements, however, justice is a distant mirage — judicial systems are physically far away, and they speak a language and impose fees that make them inaccessible to most citizens.<sup>51</sup>

Without justice during the pandemic, the threat of violence will intensify. Justice systems can ensure that emergency measures — including food distribution — are implemented in a fair manner that treats all population groups equally. They can monitor and prosecute abuses by security forces, prison officials and other service providers. They can ensure that laws implemented to contain the virus comply with human rights standards and do not exacerbate social exclusion. And, working with communities, they can respond to grievances and provide redress for rights infringements.

Bringing justice closer to informal settlements will require the involvement of non-traditional justice actors. Paralegals, legal aid providers, citizens' advice services and community leaders have a stronger understanding of the needs of such communities, better access to them, and greater legitimacy than courts and lawyers.<sup>52</sup> Working with CSOs as well as Chambers of Commerce and other private sector bodies whose operations are negatively affected by violence, municipalities can support a collective response to injustice using interventions that are proven to reduce violence.

Among the most effective of these is a shift from punitive policing and sentencing approaches towards rehabilitation and conflict mediation. Prisons generally fail to rehabilitate offenders — recidivism rates worldwide are more than 60 percent<sup>53</sup> — and programs that instead direct convicted individuals to drug rehabilitation services or cognitive behavioral therapy programs, for example, are proven to be much more effective in reducing repeat offending.<sup>54</sup>

*The Fica Vivo program in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, worked with young offenders to provide alternatives to violence. Workshops on health, sexuality and gender; sports, art, dance and theatre activities; and classes aimed at improving employability and leadership skills were held during times when youth might otherwise be on the streets and were combined with policing that aimed to build ties with communities. The city saw homicide reductions of up to 47 percent.<sup>55</sup>*

Community-based mediation has proven effective in delivering justice and peace to marginalized communities. In Honduras, buses have been requisitioned to serve as mobile judicial offices in remote settlements.<sup>56</sup> In informal settlements in Latin America, *Casas de Justicia* (Houses of Justice) provide mediation services that bring together police officers, lawyers, social workers and psychologists to address conflicts holistically and reach solutions that do not require expensive court appearances.<sup>57</sup>

Paralegals — grassroots justice providers — help people living in marginalized communities such as informal settlements to understand, use and shape the law and to access justice services. They promote legal education, support community advocacy, and assist individuals and communities as they negotiate legal processes. Paralegals can also play a part in identifying individuals and families in need of food aid and in reporting violence to municipal authorities. Making paralegals an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic — and providing them with protection from violence — can



ensure that justice services continue to be provided in informal settlements and that the risks of injustice are reduced.

## Securing the food supply

### *Supporting farmers*

In most urban informal settlements, much of the food consumed by residents is grown on farms in nearby rural areas. To secure sustainable food supplies, therefore, cities should adopt a regional perspective, helping to strengthen rural infrastructure and integrate into markets the smallholder farmers who account for almost 40 percent of the world's agricultural food supply.<sup>58</sup>

The Urban Food Agenda developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) includes assistance for cities as they work with rural and urban food producers to build resilient and inclusive food supply chains.<sup>59</sup> As part of the agenda, the FAO launched a "City Region Food System (CRFS) Toolkit,"<sup>60</sup> which provides guidance for building sustainable food systems that link cities with their surrounding regions.<sup>61</sup>

In Medellín, Colombia, the CRFS approach has been used to create an observatory to monitor food security and nutrition in the city region; facilitate access to urban markets for small food producers and low-income consumers; develop urban activities such as community food gardens and food banks; and enhance community participation in planning the food supply.<sup>62</sup> In Kitwe, Zambia, a multi-stakeholder platform created by the city to manage the CRFS has been "instrumental in fostering coordination among actors in the supply chain in defining strategies and coordinated actions to mitigate COVID-19 impacts and dealing with post pandemic scenarios."<sup>63</sup>

Rural farmers can also be supported via technological inputs provided by municipalities and CSOs in partnership with the private sector. Online platforms in China, for example, have linked out-of-work farm laborers to potential employers during the pandemic.<sup>64</sup> In Sri Lanka, *FarmerNet*, a virtual trading floor, allows farmers and food traders to connect via text messaging.<sup>65</sup> In East Africa, the private sector has introduced improved and more varied seed varieties, which have greatly strengthened food security and nutrition.<sup>66</sup> The distribution of bio-fortified orange sweet potato vines in Mozambique led to significant improvements in Vitamin A consumption among children whose households participated in the program relative to those whose households did not.<sup>67</sup>

Urban farming offers a further opportunity to diversify a city's food sources and strengthen its resilience to shocks. Urban agriculture, which can be carried out in gardens or vacant lots, on roofs or balconies, or even in old tires, supplies up to 20 percent of the world's food. Improving urban soils and educating urbanites on farming techniques can help increase this proportion.<sup>68</sup>

- In British Columbia, Canada, the government declared community gardens, including those run by volunteers, an essential service that must remain open during the pandemic.<sup>69</sup>
- A re-zoning initiative in Pittsburgh, United States, made it easier for urban dwellers to acquire permits to farm in the city and to lease vacant lots to farm.<sup>70</sup>
- Fiji's Ministry of Agriculture responded to the pandemic with a Home Gardening Program wherein it distributed seed packages to all households in urban and peri-urban areas.<sup>71</sup>
- In Wuhan, China, the municipality encouraged the cultivation of 20,000 hectares of urban land to supply fresh vegetables during lockdown.<sup>72</sup>

- Kenya’s One Million Kitchen Gardens campaign provides starter kits, grants and advice for vulnerable communities to plant their own food gardens.<sup>73</sup>
- In Quito, Ecuador, the Participatory Urban Agriculture scheme trains vulnerable urban residents in organic farming techniques and has established open-air markets where participants can sell their surplus produce. The program has created 2,500 urban gardens and trained 16,700 people, most of whom are women.<sup>74</sup>
- In Quelimane, Mozambique, food waste is collected from markets and recycled into compost by community associations trained in compost-making. The compost is used to improve soil fertility in urban food gardens and has led to increases in food yields and higher incomes for farmers.<sup>75</sup>

### *From farm to city*

Ensuring that food grown in rural areas reaches urban consumers is the second key step in securing the supply chain, and a number of technological innovations have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic to clear the path from farm to city. In India, the Kisan Rath Mobile App has helped farmers and food traders find transport companies to deliver food to markets during lockdowns.<sup>76</sup> The app disseminates farmers’ requests for transportation to transport aggregators, who then obtain quotes from truckers and fleet owners.<sup>77</sup> Also in India, farmers have used WhatsApp to negotiate directly to deliver produce to urban housing cooperatives, while consumer groups have used social media to connect with farmer collectives and arrange the direct delivery of food to markets.<sup>78</sup>

Once food arrives in the city, flexibility is needed to ensure it reaches all those who need it. The city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands has temporarily waived fees for market stallholders.<sup>79</sup> In Wanjiu, South Korea, direct sales locations have been set up to link 2,000 local smallholders to 100,000 urban consumers.<sup>80</sup> Street vendors in informal settlements, moreover, could be designated as an essential service, allowing them to buy food in wholesale markets and to continue to deliver goods during confinement periods.

Food banks and other community food distribution initiatives run by CSOs and community members play an important role in securing food supplies for the urban poor. Municipalities can assist with the collection and distribution of these supplies:

- The local government of Quito, Ecuador, has helped food banks map the urban areas that are most in need of food support.<sup>81</sup>
- The municipality of Lima, Peru, is working with markets to monitor food prices and deter speculation, which could drive up prices.<sup>82</sup>
- Barcelona’s Mercabarna wholesale market has worked with Deutsche Telekom on an app that allows CSOs to arrange free food basket deliveries to households in need.<sup>83</sup>
- In Kerala, India, hundreds of community kitchens are providing free or low-cost food to the most vulnerable. Volunteers deliver food to households for a small additional fee. Hotels and catering companies have offered their services and kitchens without charge.<sup>84</sup>
- The Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad (AMC), India, responded to lockdown by setting up a “Vegetables on Wheels” program. Partnering with the Self-Employed Women’s Organization (SEWA), a trade union of informal sector workers, AMC issued a pass to designated fruit and vegetable vendors that allowed them to visit wholesale markets to buy food and travel via rickshaws funded by the municipality to deliver it to urban areas under curfew.<sup>85</sup> Thousands of kilos of vegetables were sold or given free to the most vulnerable.<sup>86</sup>

- Mexico City’s Community Dining Rooms program provides affordable meals in deprived communities. The 488 dining rooms are operated by CSOs and neighborhood groups, while the private sector donates food and the municipality provides technical, administrative and economic support. The program has reduced hunger by 30 percent in areas where the dining rooms operate.<sup>87</sup>

### *Support for consumers*

Effective delivery of food from farms to cities will need to be complemented by proactive efforts to support the most vulnerable consumers to access it. Such support can help narrow rather than widen the gap in service provision and quality of life between informal and formal settlements, lessening the unequal impacts of COVID-19 in a way that can help to mitigate the risks of violence and to “build back better” in the wake of the pandemic.

Municipal governments are not always aware of who is most in need of food support. Helplines and web-based services, such as those established by local authorities in Nagpur, India, for vulnerable individuals who need home deliveries, can help those who live in remote settlements or are unable to travel to food banks or community kitchens.<sup>88</sup> CSOs can also help: Mumbai’s KhaanaChahiye.com, a volunteer and donor network that provides 70,000 cooked meals a day across the city, relies on information from community-based organizations to target those most in need.<sup>89</sup> CSOs can also monitor food distribution campaigns and advocate for equitable delivery.

As cities emerge from lockdowns, replacing direct food distribution with cash transfers or vouchers is likely to have positive impacts on longer-term food security. Cash — delivered electronically where possible — enables people to help stimulate local economies that have lain dormant during confinement periods, and it can give those in informal settlements greater agency over their own food security. In Yemen, cash transfers led to significant increases in per capita food consumption, with much of the money spent on nutrient-rich vegetables, milk and eggs.<sup>90</sup> Cash transfers have also been found to be more efficient and more cost-effective than in-kind humanitarian support<sup>91</sup> and, in some studies, to contribute to violence prevention by reducing intimate-partner violence.<sup>92</sup>

*In Pune, India, the local council distributed temporary ration cards to 80,000 undocumented people. The cards could be exchanged for food grains delivered to people’s homes as part of a government program.<sup>93</sup>*

## III: Lessons Learned

Reviewing successful initiatives to prevent urban violence and to secure the food supply to informal settlements, a number of common factors emerge that can guide mayors and CSOs as they navigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 1. Respond to the context

Informal settlements are not all alike. Climate, soil quality, proximity to rural farmers, population density, demographic structure, income levels, trust in the state and other factors that can influence the risk of violence can vary widely. Violence prevention programs will be most effective if they are tailored to local contexts. Assessing the needs of a particular settlement should involve regular consultation with community leaders and citizens drawn from different population groups, with the aim of identifying weaknesses in the food supply, the risk factors that make violence more likely, and

the services required to address these problems. Including the most marginalized in such consultations and listening to young people and women are key to a satisfactory response.

## 2. Make communities your partners

Community members should be enlisted in both the design and implementation of interventions. In Nepal and Uganda, involving citizens in service delivery via community meetings and grievance procedures was found to improve perceptions of local and national government actors.<sup>94</sup> Again, it will be important to ensure that diverse population groups are represented in the process.<sup>95</sup> CSOs' close connections with people living in informal settlements mean they are well placed to pass information in both directions between government and citizens, to mobilize and train volunteers, and to deliver services such as food aid, cash transfers and people-centered justice.<sup>96</sup>

## 3. Evaluate and learn

Few cities have prior experience with pandemics, and the imperative to act quickly to prevent food shortages from triggering violence means that city leaders have little robust COVID-specific research to draw on. Case studies from previous emergencies such as those presented in this briefing can serve as a starting point for action if adapted to local contexts, but evaluation of the impact of programs should be ongoing, and those that are ineffective should be jettisoned. Regular surveys of community members can assess whether programs are helping to reduce food insecurity and violence and highlight areas for improvement.<sup>97</sup>

Learning from the experiences of other cities will assist municipal leaders as they develop and refine their responses. For example, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact unites 210 cities worldwide whose mayors committed to develop sustainable food systems that feed all urban citizens and to reduce food waste.<sup>98</sup> Member cities of the non-binding pact work with CSOs, businesses and policy-makers to share resources and knowledge and monitor progress towards key food sustainability indicators.<sup>99</sup>

## 4. Communicate clearly and regularly

Efficient two-way communication between municipal leaders and people living in informal settlements is critical to preventing both food insecurity and outbreaks of violence.

A survey in Nagpur, India, showed that one-third of residents lacked reliable information on the availability of food in markets during the city's lockdown, while 35 percent did not know if food delivery services were available to them,<sup>100</sup> despite the existence of government websites and apps that provided such information. This points to the importance of working with community leaders and CSOs to transmit messages related to the food supply, since they often have stronger relationships than do municipal governments with marginalized individuals and communities.

The private sector can also be engaged to improve communication. Wholesale and retail markets should publish food availability information on different platforms to both consumers and municipal leaders.<sup>101</sup> Telecommunications firms can help set up hotlines for citizens to report food or violence emergencies and to seek information and advice. Local and national media companies should be encouraged to deliver accurate information and to correct false claims.

*The government of Pakistan is sending COVID-19 awareness messages on cell phones, replacing ringtones.<sup>102</sup> Similar systems can be used for messaging around food and violence.*

Perhaps the most important communications partners are community members themselves. More likely than outsiders to be trusted by those living in informal settlements, they also speak a more comprehensible language (or languages) and have a greater awareness of the most popular information channels. Supplying community influencers with accurate information — for example, to correct misleading news that blames certain groups for shortages — can help reduce the likelihood of violence while also improving access to food.

## 5. Reach out to young people

Young people are already experiencing the harshest economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic hardship may increase the temptation to resort to violence to solve problems, and it is critical for municipal leaders and CSOs to support young people to find alternatives.

Youth who are already in conflict with the law should be rehabilitated via diversionary and restorative programs and taught skills needed by local economies.<sup>103</sup> CSOs can assist with service delivery, as well as with young people's access to COVID-19 relief programs.

Involving young people in interventions to address the effects of the pandemic can help reduce the temptations of violence and enhance both their self-respect and the regard in which they are held by the rest of the community. Youth can be engaged to distribute food, transmit information, deliver basic services such as water and sanitation, and contribute to programs aimed at deterring their peers from violence and crime. Cash payments for such activities can help young people withstand the pandemic and give them capital to set up their own businesses after it subsides.<sup>104</sup>

## 6. Adopt multi-pronged approaches

It is unrealistic to expect municipal governments or the police to prevent food insecurity and related violence without assistance. The most successful violence prevention strategies involve multiple sectors of government; multiple stakeholders from civil society, the private sector and communities themselves; and multiple strategies that encompass policing, public health measures, community engagement and support to those at risk of committing or experiencing violence.<sup>105</sup>

To manage the multiplicity of actors and approaches in such programs, cities should develop frameworks that outline objectives, define the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, and coordinate implementation and evaluation.<sup>106</sup> A policy framework developed by the government of Western Cape in South Africa, for example, adopts five key strategies to address violence and crime:

1. Strategic and systematic deployment of prevention resources to target high-risk hours, places and groups
2. Reducing the availability of firearms and the availability of alcohol
3. Improving victim support programs
4. The development of an accessible evidence base, the production of reliable injury surveillance data and the ongoing monitoring of outcomes and risk factors
5. Developing life skills and parenting skills which will eventually change social and cultural norms that produce violent offenders.<sup>107</sup>



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