Urban Poor Perceptions of Violence and Exclusion in Colombia

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CAROLINE MOSER
CATHY MCILWAINE
FOREWORD BY ANDRES SOLIMANO
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Caroline Moser
Cathy McIlwaine

Foreword by Andres Solimano

Latin America and Caribbean Region,
Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Management Unit
The World Bank
Washington, D.C.
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Societies in Crisis:
Globalization and Violence

Andres Solimano

Societies in crisis: Concept and scope

A society in crisis presents both a challenge and an opportunity. This is certainly the case in the context of Colombia, now in the fifth decade of its bitter civil war. The crisis in which Colombia finds itself today represents an integral challenge to the economy, the institutions, and the values of its society. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for changing structures that no longer work. Although this may vary according to different interests in society, the needs of the most excluded and poorest are often marginalised. Yet, as this study shows, they have very clear perceptions of those structures that they consider important to change.

The elusive concept of crisis that underpins this study has long been an important concern. The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas for instance, provides a useful taxonomy of systemic crisis comprising a fourfold classification of (a) economic crisis, (b) rationality crisis, (c) legitimation crisis, and (iv) motivation crisis (Habermas 1972). An economic crisis, termed a "realization crisis" by Habermas, may be a recession, an economic depression, or an inflationary phenomena; a rationality crisis, in Habermas's words, is a breakdown of the "rational administrative" practices necessary to maintain the economy in due course. This can be interpreted as the inability of the government in a crisis situation, to properly manage and regulate the economic system. A legitimation crisis, in turn, is characterized by a breakdown in the level of public support, credibility, and trust on existing institutions. A motivation crisis is a crisis in the realm of values, traditions, and norms in society. Both economic and rationality crises belong to the economic sphere, legitimation crises are political in essence and motivational crises
belong to the sociocultural realm. The boundaries may shift, in turn, depending on the specific nature of a crisis in a country during a given historical period.

Thus, a societal crisis is a comprehensive phenomena occurring simultaneously at an economic, political, socio-cultural (value-system) level. It is a systemic, rather than a partial or local, phenomena in which institutions become dysfunctional in terms of their ability to process internal societal conflicts, as both the formal and informal rules that mediate social interaction collapse. Such a breakdown often has far-reaching, mostly negative, effects. At the economic level, the investment climate deteriorates in an environment without well-defined rules (e.g., property rights may not be enforced), with ensuing adverse effects in terms of economic growth and employment creation. Countries in crisis rarely experience economic growth and development is postponed. At the social level conflict erodes trust and social cohesion-the social capital so important in development processes.

Another manifestation of crisis is the emergence of violence, a phenomena linked to a breakdown in rules of behavior (see below). High levels of violence and insecurity not only deteriorate the investment climate, but have economic as well as human, social, and political costs which exacerbate the crisis. In a crisis situation, public objectives may start to be replaced by private interests. Accountability and monitoring of the "agent" (e.g. governments or public officials) by "principals" (parliament, judiciary system, the people) weaken substantially. Often the result is corruption, a phenomenon that has received substantial attention in the 1990s, particularly in the development community. Corruption has a demoralizing effect on the public (and on honest officials in the public sector institutions), eroding social creditability in institutions. In Habermas's framework, corruption, and, to an extent, violence, can be understood from several angles. At one level, corruption is a manifestation of a "rationality crisis". In this sense common administrative practices of sound governments weaken to such an extent that conditions prevail for the acquisition of public assets for private benefit. In turn, when corruption reaches significant proportions a legitimation crisis may develop, eroding trust and confidence in government and other public institutions. Finally, if corruption became an ingrained social practice, affecting the norms and values of society, this then contains the typical features of a motivational crisis. Thus Colombia is experiencing a dirty war, economic recession and high levels of corruption, all of which are affected by and in turn affect the current crisis.
Crisis and Violence: Global and national causes

Since the theme of this book is violence, it may be useful to put the issue into historical perspective. Marx, as well as other 19th century political theorists highlighted the fact that the most important political changes in history were surrounded by violence, sometimes acute and dramatic. Such was the case of the French, Russian and American revolutions— to name a few important examples of radical social change. In a more contemporary context, the post-cold war period of the 1990s has also been characterized by violence and internal armed conflict. Examples of this include the following: the disintegration of the Soviet Union, followed by violence in former soviet states such as the Chechnya war; the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, leading to the more recent armed conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. The degree of violence and armed conflict in Africa in the 1990s, such as in Rwanda and Somalia to name but two of the conflicts affecting the region, have frightened the international community.

In Latin America, violence and armed conflict have also been present, such as in Chiapas, Mexico. The long lasting Colombian conflict is probably the most intractable, armed conflict in South-America, given the complex interplay of guerrilla, narcotraffics, paramilitary, and the army. On the positive side, the 1990s in Central America witnessed the signing of peace agreements, and the end of civil wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. These coincided with the end of the cold war. Yet these countries continue to experience high levels of violence in terms of street violence, social violence and violent crime which pervade all sectors of their societies, thus hampering their post-conflict recovery.

Looking ahead in the early 21st century it seems that political and ethnic violence will, unfortunately, be prevalent phenomena in several regions of the world. The historian Eric Hobsbawn (1999) has recently pointed out that a decade after the dissolution of the Soviet block, the process of state-building in the former soviet republics and former Yugoslavia is still an unfolding process. Needless to say, those processes are far from being peaceful and orderly events. The Andean region of Latin America also turned very volatile in the late 20th century, a trend that is bound to pervade into the early 21st century. Beside war-torn Colombia, traditionally peaceful Ecuador shows the first signs of unrest that could lead to political violence—as a consequence of the tensions accumulating from deep economic crisis, increased regional division, political fragmentation, and the eruption of an active and powerful indigenous movement with a radical economic and political agenda. In addition, Peru is experiencing complex reactions to its current presidential elec-
tions, and Venezuela is engaged in an attempt at internal political and institutional change the final outcomes of which still remain uncertain.

Therefore, the end of the cold war and the onset of globalization in the 1990s, contrary to initial expectations, have not been followed by widespread growth and social and political cohesion. Rather the last decade has seen an increase in inequality, exclusion, and violence around the globe. However, the nature of violence has changed when compared to that of the cold-war years. Wars between countries have become less important (almost disappearing), while internal armed conflicts within countries have become a more important source of violence. In addition, internal conflict in countries such as Colombia, have changed their nature from a conflict with a relatively important ideological component to a conflict tied to (and financed by) the large economic rents generated by the drug-industry and kidnapping. It would be interesting to know more about the effects of a globalized (probably illegal) arms market that provides the weapons that sustain such conflicts. Furthermore, as this study shows, Colombia is affected by many different types of violence at different levels that rise from problems not likely to be resolved by any peace process.

Summing-up, several factors can be highlighted as 'new' determinants of violence in the post-cold war, globalized world of the late 20th and early 21st century. These include the reconfiguration of new national states after the collapse of the soviet block, the eruption of underlying ethnic conflicts in several countries, the emergence of an apparently important global arms market, the competition for increasing shares of the large economic rents generated by narco-trafficking, internal social conflict generated by deep economic crisis and the loss of legitimation (Habermas's 'legitimation' crisis) of existing political regimes because of corruption and poor management. In the Latin American context, increasing inequality and social exclusion are leading to higher levels of tension and frustration throughout the region, often resulting in increased levels of violence as countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Peru fail to move away from the cultures of violence they lived in the 1980s. These will be some of the main challenges facing Colombia in a post-conflict context, a country which has lived through a simmering civil war for half a century, in which unemployment, unequal income distribution, and social exclusion are some of the main determinants of violence, a situation only worsened by its recent unanticipated economic crisis.
Reforms to rebuild societies in crisis and reduce violence

We have seen that crises are a multidimensional phenomena with several manifestations: sluggish economic growth, dysfunctional institutions, corruption, and violence. Interestingly enough, societal crises often accompany and/or trigger important historical transformations. The most recent examples of important political and economic events at a global scale are the end of the cold war in the late 1980s and the process of economic globalization in the 1990s. Overcoming societal crisis require comprehensive economic, institutional, and political reform.

Measured in a historical-time scale, economic reforms can proceed at a faster pace than institutional reforms. In turn, institutional reforms that alter formal rules can take place more rapidly than changes oriented to modify informal rules of human behavior, based on cultural norms, values, traditions, and other historical factors. These considerations are valid when addressing the problem of violence. Its determinants are multiple, and linked to such factors as the occurrence of legitimation and motivational crises, broad historical transformations, and economic crisis. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy to reduce violence must include broad economic and institutional reforms, specific interventions to address factors that propagate violence, and, ultimately, a change in values and cultural norms that certainly underlay the phenomena of violence. In addressing such issues the perceptions of poor communities themselves are essential. Through the participatory research methodology employed in this study the inter-linkages between different types of problems and their relation to different types of violence can be explored from the voices of the poor themselves. In this way the findings from this study complement more widely known economic and statistical data on violence, to show the complex reality of violence and exclusion in poor urban communities. This study follows on from a sector study on violence in Colombia also published in this series (Solimano 2000, World Bank 1999). It provides the next stages of the critical work necessary to better understand the forces involved in violence reduction and the transition to peace in Colombian society in the coming years.
This study is based on research conducted during January and February of 1999, using a participatory urban appraisal methodology. The study is part of a larger initiative within the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Department, Latin America and Caribbean Region, World Bank—the Urban Peace Program—directed by Caroline Moser (Lead Specialist Social Development).

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Executive Summary

Despite sustained improvements in its social and economic indicators over the past several decades and its rich stock of natural and human resources, Colombia remains plagued by violence. The very high level of violence reflects a variety of factors, including the country's simmering 50-year-old civil war, the increase in armed conflict, the rise in urban and rural crime, and drug cartel-linked violence.

As the government struggles to reach peace agreements with guerrilla and paramilitary groups, political violence and armed conflict have been the primary focuses of political analysts and civil society groups alike. The perceptions of violence by people living in poor communities have received much less attention. This report addresses this issue by providing the results of a participatory study of violence conducted in low-income urban communities in Colombia.

Objectives of the Study

The study documents how people living in poor urban communities in Colombia perceive violence. Specifically, it identifies the categories of violence affecting poor communities, the costs of different types of violence, the effect of violence on social capital, and the causes and effects of social exclusion.

To describe the relationships that produce and sustain this cycle of violence and to begin to identify interventions to break it, the study develops a violence-capital-exclusion nexus—an analytical framework that links different types of violence both to society’s capital and to the exclusion of its poor population. To incorporate the rarely heard voices of the poor, the study uses the participatory urban appraisal methodology, which emphasizes local knowledge and enables locals to make their own analysis of the problems they face and identify their own solutions.

Fieldwork was undertaken in nine predominantly low-income communities located in seven cities or towns that are representative of Colombia’s urban areas. These communities, identified by pseudonyms, included three barrios in Bogotá (Embudo, 14 de Febrero, and Jericó); two barrios in cities long connected with the drug cartel (Pórtico, Medellín,
and El Arca, Cali); two barrios in cities or towns with large numbers of displaced people (Amanecer, Bucaramanga, and Rosario, Girón); and two barrios in frontier towns located in areas rich in natural resources (Cachicamo, Yopal, and Colombia Chiquita, Aguazul).

**Types of Violence**

Violence-related problems emerged as the single most important type of problem facing the urban poor. Within this category, drug use was identified as a major issue in many communities. Lack of physical capital was the second most important type of problem, with unemployment the most frequently cited specific problem. Lack of social capital was identified as a problem more often than lack of human capital. Lack of natural capital was cited as a problem only in recently established settlements.

Focus groups in the nine communities listed an average of 25 different types of violence, with one community distinguishing 60 different types of violence. The various types of violence were grouped into three interrelated categories: political, economic, and social. Economic violence was cited most often (54 percent of all types of violence), followed by social violence (32 percent) and political violence (14 percent).

Perceptions of violence varied across cities and demographic groups. Intrafamily violence emerged as especially important in Bogotá, gang violence as very important in Cali and Medellín, and political violence as important in frontier towns and towns with large numbers of displaced people.

Elderly people were most concerned with insecurity and drugs. Adult women focused on violence against children, whereas adult men were most concerned with political and youth violence. Young people were especially troubled by the drug problem. Young men were also concerned with gang and militia violence, and young women were worried about rape outside the home. Children's perceptions, elicited from drawings, revealed the association between fear and guns.

**Costs, Causes, and Consequences of Violence**

Different types of violence are interrelated in a highly complex and dynamic manner. Social violence within households and families, for example, may lead young people to take drugs and join gangs, which may in turn lead to economic violence—including robbery and killing—or political violence associated with guerilla or paramilitary groups. Understanding each type of violence is thus critical to understanding the nature of the problems affecting people living in poor communities.
Families, Households, and Social Violence

Intrafamily violence is a daily occurrence in Colombia, and it is closely linked to other types of violence. Study participants identified some 20 different types of violence perpetrated within the home, including incest, sexual abuse, and murder. People in the communities associated the level of intrafamily violence with various factors, including changes in the economy and the rate of unemployment, alcohol (and to a lesser extent drug) use, and machismo among men and submissiveness among women.

Intrafamily violence was perceived as undermining how households functioned internally in terms of constructing norms, values, and trust. It also eroded social capital networks between households and reduced the human capital endowments of children and young people. Violence within the home was perceived as leading to violence outside the home.

Violence was perceived as permeating the spectrum of social relations within poor urban communities, with the critical nexus being households and families. With trust in the home severely eroded by violence, children spend long periods of time in the street with their friends. Young men often join gangs or military groups associated with political violence. Young women engage in sexual relations at an early age, often becoming pregnant.

Drug Consumption and Economic Violence

Drug consumption, particularly among young men, was perceived as the leading cause of economic violence in most of the communities studied. Children were reported to begin consuming marijuana at age 8, moving on to petrol and glue by age 12. Teenagers began using bazuco (a type of cocaine) at 14, later moving on to perico (another type of cocaine), the most expensive of the drugs used.

The most frequently cited causes of drug consumption were intrafamily violence and conflict, peer pressure, and parental example. Other causes included the lack of organized recreational opportunities, especially sports and leisure facilities, and unemployment, which made it difficult for young people to fill their days.

Drug consumption eroded the human capital of young people, who often dropped out of school after getting involved with drugs. School dropouts were rarely able to secure employment, leading them to engage in illegal activities, such as drug dealing and robbery. Drug consumption also increased fear in communities, with drug addicts perceived as the perpetrators of assaults and robbery. Many people responded to the perception of danger by remaining indoors in the evenings. The result was an erosion of community-level social capital.
Unemployment, Exclusion, and Economic Violence

Economic violence was also found to be tied to the level of unemployment, which was very high in the communities studied as a result of both the nationwide recession and the large number of people fleeing political violence in the countryside. Employment prospects were also perceived as being reduced by the stigma of coming from the *barrio*, which many people outside the community associate with criminal activity.

High levels of unemployment were closely linked to various types of violence. In some cases violent crime was a last-resort survival response to unemployment. In other cases it reflected desperation and frustration created by lack of economic opportunities. Many people reported that using drugs was a way of dealing with lack of work and that robbing was a way of paying for drugs.

Another factor tied to economic violence (and violence in general) was exclusion of young people, which many young people dealt with by using drugs or becoming involved in violent or criminal activities. A major cause of exclusion was high levels of intergenerational conflict, often the result of intrafamily violence.

Community Level Social Institutions, Perverse Social Capital, and Political Violence

Violence not only affects individuals and households, but communities themselves. Study participants identified 371 social institutions across the nine research communities. These institutions included both institutions that benefited the community (that is, created positive social capital) and institutions that benefited their members while hurting the community as a whole (that is, created perverse social capital).

Women’s and childcare groups and state-run social service delivery organizations (primarily schools and health centers) were trusted by most members of the community. Institutions connected with the perpetration or prevention of violence, such as gangs or state security and justice institutions, were the least trusted.

Perverse organizations were the most prevalent membership organizations, with 16 types of illegal groups functioning in the nine communities. Guerrilla and paramilitary groups perpetrating political violence were universally feared in areas where their presence was dominant. Underlying this fear was the lack of trust among community members, who were afraid to talk openly about the problem. The fear of reprisals eroded solidarity, replacing it with the belief that people must look after themselves to survive.
Community Perceptions of Solutions to the Problem of Violence

Study participants identified four types of strategies for dealing with violence: avoidance, confrontation, conciliation, and other strategies. Most people responded to violence by keeping silent about it out of powerlessness or fear of retribution. Many changed their mobility patterns, avoiding taking certain routes or simply staying home in the evening.

People in the communities recognized that the continuum of violence requires that a variety of solutions be implemented simultaneously. Almost half of the interventions proposed involved creating social capital. Within this category, the promotion of family values and dialogue between families and communities was the most frequently mentioned proposal. Other proposed interventions included improving education, establishing more drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, improving employment opportunities, and integrating young people into society. Many community members also endorsed increasing the resources of community organizations and obtaining external assistance to establish new organizations. Some endorsed social cleansing and harsh police actions to crack down on violence.

Public Policy Recommendations

Local communities identified three national-level binding constraints that policymakers need to address. These include:

- *The pervasive nature of political violence.* Negotiation of peace with the guerrillas, paramilitary organizations, and other groups is an important precondition for the success of other violence reduction interventions.
- *The serious problem of displaced people,* which affects the daily lives of people in all communities.
- *The lack of employment,* which leads to drug use, crime, and violence.

To address these problems, people in the communities suggested the following interventions:

- Create job opportunities in the formal, informal, and self-employment sectors.
- Attack the problem of drug use.
- Reduce society's tolerance for intrahousehold violence.
• Rebuild trust in the police and the judicial system.
• Strengthen the capacity of community-based membership organizations, particularly those run by women.
• Target interventions at young people.
Chapter One
Introduction

Colombia has long been plagued by violence. Despite being one of the most enduring democracies in South America and sustained improvements in its social and economic indicators over the past several decades, the country has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. The very high level of violence reflects the country’s 50-year-old simmering civil war, the rise in armed conflict, urban and rural crime, and the presence of drug cartels.

Until the late 1980s, economic development continued unabated in Colombia. Armed conflict affected primarily those involved in the political conflict and marginal populations in remote rural areas. Urban crime and violence affected mainly low-income barrio dwellers.

In the past decade the scale and intensity of violence has changed, with violence now dominating the daily lives of most Colombians. Remote guerrilla conflict has turned into a countrywide war that involves other actors, such as paramilitary groups and drug cartels. The causes of violence have also changed. These include external events such as the collapse of the Cold War, which has affected funding sources for guerrilla activity. It also includes internal changes relating to economic liberalization, which have had implications for the demand for labor (and levels of unemployment), and the growing levels of inequality, which are associated with areas of the country in which coal and oil developments have occurred. Since 1982 successive governments have tried to find both military and political solutions for reaching peace with different guerrilla groups. State agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private foundations have spent vast resources attempting to reduce levels of urban crime, while military and police forces have endeavored to break the drug cartels.

The World Bank’s 1997 Colombian Country Assistance Strategy (World Bank 1997), which adopted a participatory approach that included consultations with civil society, identified violence as the country’s key development constraint. That constraint is now affecting macro- and microeconomic growth and productivity in Colombia, as well as reducing the government’s capacity to alleviate the poverty, inequality, and
exclusion that affect the majority of its residents in both urban and rural areas. The Country Assistance Strategy recommended a comprehensive intersector policy, with violence reduction—and its counterpart, peace and development—identified as one of six key areas of strategic importance in which the World Bank could assist Colombia in its development process.

In 1999 the Bank completed a sector study on violence based on background papers commissioned from the foremost experts in their fields, most of them Colombians (World Bank 1999). The study included three critical components: a conceptual framework, which identified a continuum of violence, including political, economic, and social violence; an assessment of the costs of violence in terms of the erosion of the country’s capital and associated assets (especially its social capital); and a brief framework for a National Strategy for Peace and Development, comprising a national-level peace program, sector-level initiatives to integrate violence reduction into priority sectors, and municipal-level social capital projects.

**Objectives and Research Framework of the Study**

In studying violence, most journalists and research violentólogos (violence experts, a uniquely Colombian discipline) focus on political violence and armed conflict. The perceptions of violence by poor communities have received much less attention. To address this issue, this report provides the results of a recently completed study conducted in poor urban communities in Colombia. The study was undertaken as part of the third stage in the Bank’s contribution to developing operational interventions for peace and development.

The objective of the study is to document violence in Colombia as perceived by poor urban communities in terms of the following four questions:

- **What categories of violence affect poor communities?** Is the political violence that dominates the newspapers and preoccupies politicians the only important source of concern for poor people, or are other types of violence also important? Building on the work of violence experts in Colombia and the World Bank Colombia Sector Study (World Bank 1998), the study distinguishes among political, economic, and social violence, identifying each in terms of a particular type of power that consciously or unconsciously uses violence to gain or maintain itself.

- **What are the costs of different types of violence?** What is the financial or psychological cost of violence to poor communities, households, and individuals in terms of the erosion of physical, human, natural, and social capital and their associated assets?
Does violence erode or foster the creation of social capital? Does "social capital for some imply social exclusion for others" (Harriss and De Renzio 1997; p. 926)? In fact social capital may lead to negative outcomes, and social capital itself may be created by activities that do not serve the public good. In examining this issue the study distinguishes between productive, or positive, social capital and unproductive, or perverse, social capital (Rubio 1997).

Is violence the cause or consequence of exclusion? The complex relationship between violence and poverty has been widely debated. Social exclusion (the process through which individuals or groups are excluded from full participation in the society in which they live) may be a more useful concept than poverty for understanding violence, because it involves a more dynamic and multidimensional conceptualization of deprivation. The study thus seeks to identify the causal linkages between violence and exclusion.

In order to identify the relationships that produce and sustain violence in poor urban communities in Colombia and to begin to identify interventions to break this cycle, the study develops a violence-capital-exclusion nexus (figure 1.1). This analytical framework links different types of violence to both society’s capital and the exclusion of its poor population.

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**Figure 1.1. The Violence — Capital — Exclusion Nexus**

![Diagram showing the relationship between violence, capital, and exclusion.](image-url)
The Participatory Methodology and Its Implications for Policy Recommendations

Like poverty, violence can be measured in different ways (see Baulch 1996 and Moser 1998). Both phenomena can be measured objectively using large, random sample household surveys that use measures of income or consumption as proxies for the variable being measured (Ravallion 1992). Both can also be understood subjectively using participatory assessments that collect data on multiple indicators that emerge out of the complex and diverse local realities in which the poor live (Chambers 1992, 1995). The same is true of violence.

Extensive statistical and political analyses of Colombia violence exist (World Bank 1999). To complement those findings with the rarely heard voices of the poor, this study uses a participatory urban appraisal methodology. This approach emphasizes local knowledge and enables local people to make their own appraisals, analyses, and plans. Its iterative approach to research is suitable for the investigation of the complex causal relationships that affect violence (Moser and McIlwaine 1999). The reliability of the findings is increased through triangulation—the use of a variety of techniques and sources to investigate the same issues and verify results. Qualitative research such as this study, which relies on in-depth investigation of a small number of communities, also uses purposive rather than random sampling. This means selecting communities that are considered representative of the issue under investigation and conducting a participatory urban appraisal with sufficient groups to be representative of each community. (See annex A for a summary of participatory urban appraisal techniques.)

Participatory urban appraisal involves an extensive number of different tools (see annex A). The most important ones used in the current study are listings that provided the basis for the quantitative data analysis, causal impact diagrams that analyze the causes and effects of particular issues, and the institutional mapping diagrams that allow the identification of social institutions perceived as important within communities. All participatory urban appraisal tools are implemented in focus groups facilitated by two researchers and comprising between 2 and 20 people (occasionally they are conducted with one person).

The primary aim of participatory urban appraisal is to allow the people to express their own ideas and perceptions. Therefore, in the focus groups people are encouraged to design the diagrams and provide the associated text themselves. This process often is referred to as "handing over the stick" (in the urban Colombian context it usually involves pens and pencils). The rationale behind this methodology is the transfer of power from the researcher to the researched. Consequently, all the dia-
grams reproduced in this document were drawn by people in the communities themselves and use their language.²

The study describes community perceptions of the causes, costs, and consequences of violence and identifies local perceptions of potential solutions to the problems described. Whether perceptual data can legitimately be used to influence or define violence reduction policies or strategies is currently an issue of debate. The Bank’s recently completed report “Global Synthesis: Consultations with the Poor” (Narayan and others 1999) and its endorsement by President James Wolfensohn in his 1999 annual meeting address has certainly given a measure of legitimacy to this approach in international agencies.

During the past decade several innovative interventions have been proposed to reduce violence (table 1.1). All of the approaches reflect different solutions, although in general there has been a shift away from the control of violence toward violence prevention and most recently to rebuilding social capital.

By presenting bottom-up solutions to violence, this study aims to contribute to the search for sustainable solutions. The solutions recommended are those that local communities themselves perceive as appropriate. The approach adopted here, therefore, is one of a number of approaches that can guide policymakers concerned with reducing violence.

Problems Associated with Using a Participatory Urban Appraisal to Study Violence

Determining perceptions of violence in communities deeply affected by violence is difficult for several reasons. First, the law of silence makes many people reluctant to discuss violence directly or indirectly. This unwillingness to speak out was most evident in communities affected by guerrilla and paramilitary activity that had experienced killings or threats to community members. To deal with the problem, the researchers made appointments to talk at safe times, when people were sure that the paramilitaries or guerillas were not present, and conducted focus groups in back rooms of houses rather than in the street.

Second, intrafamily violence is a highly sensitive issue. Young people were often more willing to discuss the issue than older people, and women were more likely to raise the issue than men. The problem of alcohol abuse, a major cause of domestic violence, was often used as a conduit to discuss violence in the home.

To ensure the safety of the people who participated in the study and to prevent retribution, the researchers changed the names of all study participants and communities.² To ensure the researchers’ safety and help negotiate with gatekeepers, the research teams included people with guaranteed access to the communities.
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<td>Violence prevention through the reduction of individual risk factors</td>
<td>Economic, social</td>
<td>Top-down surveillance; risk factor identification; resultant behavior modification; scaling up of successful interventions</td>
<td>Almost exclusive focus on individual; often imposed top down; highly sensitive to quality of surveillance data; limitations in indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict transformation</td>
<td>Nonviolent resolution of conflict through negotiated terms between conflicting parties</td>
<td>Political, social</td>
<td>Negotiations to ensure conflict reduction between different social actors, often using third-party mediation. May be top down or bottom up.</td>
<td>Often long term in its impact; often faces challenges in bringing parties to the table and in mediating conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>Legal enforcement of human rights and documentation of abuses by states and other social actors</td>
<td>Political, social</td>
<td>Top-down legal enforcement reinforced by bottom-up popular participation and NGO lobbying</td>
<td>Legalistic framework often difficult to enforce in a context of lawlessness, corruption, and impunity; documentation of abuse sometimes dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>Creation of social capital to reduce violence in both informal and formal social institutions, such as families, community organizations, and the judiciary</td>
<td>Political, economic, social</td>
<td>Bottom-up participatory appraisal of violence; institutional mapping to address problems; community participation in violence reduction measures</td>
<td>Less well-articulated than other approaches; fewer indicators developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description and Categorization of Communities Studied

Fieldwork was undertaken in nine predominantly low-income settlements or communities, located in seven cities and towns that are broadly representative of Colombia’s urban areas (table 1.2). The communities reflect coverage of different geographical areas of the country as well as different types of violence.

The nine communities studied can be categorized into four main urban area types: the capital, large metropolitan areas with a long ties to the drug cartel, medium-size cities or small towns with large numbers of displaced people, and frontier towns located in areas rich in natural resources. In the capital, fieldwork was conducted in three communities: Embudo, Jericó, and 14 de Febrero. Embudo, a colonial settlement, is located in the central area of Santa Fe. Jericó and 14 de Febrero, both established in the 1970s and 1980s, are located in the southern part of Bogotá. Jericó was founded by three families who invaded a large hacienda and then illegally sold off subplots. The community of 14 de Febrero was established following land invasions by the Central Nacional Provivienda, a left-wing party linked to the Colombian Communist Party.

Two communities, Pórtico and El Arca, were selected in cities with ties to the drug cartel. Pórtico is located in Medellín, Colombia’s second largest city. El Arca is located in Cali, the third largest city in Colombia. Both cities continue to be dominated by the drug cartel, despite the arrest and later assassination of Pablo Escobar of the Medellín cartel in 1993 and the capture of the Rodríguez Orejuela brothers and other leaders of the main Cali cartel in 1995.

Communities in medium-size cities or small towns included Amanecer and Rosario, both located in Bucaramanga. Amanecer is located within the city limits of the Santander departmental capital. Rosario is located within the jurisdiction of the town of Girón. Metropolitan Bucaramanga has a large number of displaced people, many of them from the Magdalena Medio region. In Rosario, a relatively new, unconsolidated settlement with high levels of squatting and cheap rental housing, displaced people represent more than half of the population.

Two frontier town communities were included in the study. Cachicamo is located in Yopal, the capital of the Department of Casanare. Colombia Chiquita is located in Aguazul. Both towns are located in the oil-producing region of the Llanos, which has been affected by the booms and busts associated with oil development. During the mid-1980s the oil boom brought significant economic activity to both communities, as international oil companies constructed facilities. Once the facilities were completed, the economies of both communities collapsed, as demand for labor fell dramatically.
Table 1.2. Descriptions of Urban Communities Studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>14 de Embudo</th>
<th>Jericó</th>
<th>Pórtico</th>
<th>El Arca</th>
<th>Amanecer</th>
<th>Rosario</th>
<th>Cachicamo</th>
<th>Colombia Chiquita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>Medellín, Antioquia</td>
<td>Cali, Valle de Cauca</td>
<td>Bucaramanga, Santander</td>
<td>Girón, Santander</td>
<td>Yopal, Casanare, Aguazul, Casanare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of city</strong></td>
<td>Large metropolitan area/capital city</td>
<td>Large metropolitan area/capital city</td>
<td>Large metropolitan area/capital city</td>
<td>Large metropolitan area with drug cartel history</td>
<td>Medium-size city with displaced populations</td>
<td>Small town with displaced populations</td>
<td>Frontier town in area rich in natural resources</td>
<td>Frontier town in area rich in natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic status</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor and middle-income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intracity location</strong></td>
<td>Inner-city</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
<td>Central urban</td>
<td>Peri-urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form of establishment</strong></td>
<td>Colonial residential area</td>
<td>Invasion of private land by Central Nacional Provivienda</td>
<td>Invasion of private land and purchase of lots</td>
<td>Purchase of lots on private farmland</td>
<td>Invasion of private land by M-19 guerrillas</td>
<td>Purchase of lots on private farmland</td>
<td>Invasion of unused public land</td>
<td>First settlement registered in municipality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Two
Summary Findings: Perceptions of General Problems and Violence

Rather than ask respondents specifically about violence, the participatory urban appraisal first focused on people's perceptions of the main problems affecting them and their community. Thus it did not assume that violence would necessarily be an important issue in people's daily lives.

Perceptions of Problems in Poor Urban Communities

Violence was the single most frequently cited problem facing the urban poor (table 2.1). Respondents identified 14 types of violence-related problems, with drugs leading the list. Drug consumption and its associated problems represented 21 percent of all violence problems (annex B, table 1).

Important differences exist in perceptions of violence across communities. In Pórtico, Medellín, the Peace and Conciliation Process of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of problem</th>
<th>Percentage of total problems cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence-related</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of physical capital</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of social capital</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of human capital</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of natural capital</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 159 focus group listings of general problems.