Backgrounder

Safe and Inclusive Cities:
IDRC and UK's DFID join forces to reduce urban violence

Fifteen research teams have been awarded multi-year grants of up to CA$500,000 each to undertake research in 40 cities across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. Together they will identify key knowledge gaps, test the effectiveness of urban violence reduction strategies, and propose comprehensive solutions to urban violence, inequalities, and poverty based on rigorous data collection and analysis.

In the Khayelitsha township of Cape Town, South Africa, for example, researchers will examine the impact that improving urban environments and public spaces might have on reducing the city's high rates of violence and homicides. In urban Pakistan, experts will focus on how the perception of traditional gender roles might be complicit in driving violence against women among urban youth of working class neighbourhoods of Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Karachi, one of the world's fastest-growing and most violent cities. In Rio de Janeiro, Durban, and Mumbai, researchers will look at how poor urban planning may be contributing to forced evictions and mass relocations, which in turn can lead to violence in the form of protests, riots, looting, sexual violence, and criminal acts to secure access to services and spaces.

Project overviews:

AFRICA

- South African researchers from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) will examine how effective government-led poverty reduction programs have been in combatting violence in Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Cape Town.

- Researchers at the University of Cape Town in South Africa will focus on engaging local communities to improve urban and public spaces by upgrading infrastructure, such as providing better lighting and safer access to public bathrooms, and water points. The project will also investigate the impact of services such as neighbourhood watches for victims of violent crime.

- Researchers from Oxfam Canada, Zimbabwe's Southern and Eastern African Regional Centre for Women's Law at the University of Harare Law School, and the Musasa Project, a local women's rights NGO, will examine the relationship between unemployment, overcrowded neighbourhoods, the lack of services, and gender-based violence in six urban centres across Zimbabwe.

- Using technologies like Geographic Information Systems, the University of Ghana's Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research will map the geography of crime, investigating the relationship between average incomes and crime rates in select neighbourhoods in three Ghanaian cities.

- Côte d'Ivoire's Université Alassane Ouattara's researchers will examine what impact civil conflict may have on new and emerging trends in urban criminal violence of three Ivorian cities over the last 30 years.

- The Chaire de Dynamique Sociale of the Democratic Republic of Congo will investigate and document the causes and perpetrators of violence in Kinshasa and Mbuji-Mayi. The research will focus on understanding violence dynamics among youth, including women, rebels, and militarized civilians.

ASIA

- In India, researchers from the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology University and the Institute for Human Development Funding will investigate the urban poor's survival strategies and their efforts to push for better city planning in slums and informal settlements of Ahmedabad, Delhi, Guwahati, and Patna. Researchers will assess how cities planned in collaboration with the poor can reduce social tensions and violence.

- The Institute of Business Administration of Pakistan will seek to understand how traditional gender roles are perceived in poor urban neighbourhoods of Karachi and Islamabad, and how they may be complicit in driving different types of violence. Using this evidence, researchers will propose concrete changes to public services to reduce gender-based violence in urban Pakistan.

- Research led by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka and the Centre of Development Studies in India will examine how displaced people cope with risks associated with eviction, nutrition, the basic needs of women and children, legal status, and protection in three urban areas of Sri Lanka and India.

LATIN AMERICA

- Researchers from Costa Rica's Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales will examine why urban communities with similar conditions of social exclusion experience different levels of violence. The study will compare six cities of different sizes in Costa Rica and El Salvador.

- The Centro de Estudios en Seguridad Ciudadana del Instituto de Asuntos Públicos in Chile will examine whether urban segregation, combined with a lack of access to government programs, contributes to increased levels of violence in Bogota, Colombia, Lima, Peru, and Santiago, Chile.

- Researchers from Venezuela's Laboratorio de Ciencias Sociales want to understand why Caracas, Venezuela is an exception to the theory suggesting the close relationship between high income inequalities and high levels of crime. They look at the role institutions play in Venezuela to mitigate violence.

CROSS-REGIONAL

- Research led by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa will map out the relationship between inequality, poverty, and violent crime in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Cape Town, South Africa by measuring the impact and cost effectiveness of concrete violence prevention interventions. The goal is to understand the importance of social cohesion and collective action as a strategy to reduce urban violence.

- A project, led by India's Tata Institute of Social Sciences, South Africa's University of Kwazulu-Natal, and Brazil's Instituto de Pesquisa e Planejamento Urbano e Regional, introduces social justice as a new concept to reduce rates of violence in Mumbai, India, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Durban, South Africa. It explores coping strategies adopted by marginalized groups – women, informal workers, the elderly, migrants, and children – to deal with violence, poverty, and inequality.

- Brazil's Instituto Promundo undertakes research in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Maputo, Mozambique to understand why twice as many men than women commit and are victims of homicides and other violent crimes. How do gender inequalities contribute to high levels of gang-related crimes?