Strengthening human security by fostering peaceful coexistence and improving citizen security in three municipalities in the Department of Sonsonate

UN Trust Fund for Human Security

Fast Facts

Country: El Salvador
Duration: March 2008 – June 2011
Implementing UN Agencies: UNDP; UNICEF; WHO/PAHO; ILO
Other Implementing Partners: Council on Public Security; Local Municipalities
Budget: $2,399,820
Key Words: Crime and violence reduction; urban regeneration; community security; youth; women

GUATEMALA

HONDURAS

Sonsonate

San Salvador

North Pacific Ocean

NICARAGUA

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

50 km

BACKGROUND

Fifteen years after the negotiation of the Peace Accords that brought an end to over a decade of conflict, significant advancements had been made in conflict resolution, crime reduction, and human development in many regions of El Salvador. However, the dividends of peace and development were slow to reach vulnerable and marginalized communities in the western Department of Sonsonate. In 2005, Sonsonate had one of the highest homicide rates in the country, with 62 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants compared to a national average of 54.5. Moreover, insufficient law enforcement allowed the proliferation of youth gangs, drug trafficking, firearms, and gender-based violence. Meanwhile, communities in Sonsonate endured the country's highest levels of poverty, with institutional birth coverage rates well below the national average and limited access to education. To address these interrelated human security threats, a comprehensive human security approach was needed to establish citizen security, improve urban development, foster peaceful co-existence, and build productive State-society partnerships.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project worked to build the capacity of local authorities to tackle violent crime while engaging communities in efforts to regenerate urban areas in Sonosnate. In this regard, the project aimed to improve the immediate and long-term security of the population through: (i) advancing coordinated action between national institutions and civil society; (ii) improving urban spaces for better safety and security; (iii) implementing strategies for the prevention and reduction of armed violence; (iv) strengthening prevention against family violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking; and (v) promoting efforts to reduce gender inequalities.

BENEFICIARIES

Direct beneficiaries comprised community-based organisations, local government, the national police, as well as the ministries of education and health, and the judiciary. At community level, almost 30,000 children and youth benefitted from safer recreational spaces, vocational training, and protection against violence and trafficking, while vulnerable women received support to kick-start income generating activities as well as improved access to social support services.

Credit: UNDP

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NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) The project successfully improved the effectiveness of and coordination between State and civil society institutions responsible for violence prevention and the promotion of peaceful coexistence. For example, law enforcement institutions and civil society organisations were trained on community policing mechanisms, while a municipal firearms ban was enacted and accompanied by an awareness raising campaign on the dangers of firearms. This contributed to a 16% reduction in crime rates in Sonsonate between 2009 and 2010 as well as improving trust in the police and fostering cohesion between neighbours.

(ii) Moreover, through the active participation of local communities, the project successfully created safer urban environments in the three municipalities. To this end, a community center was constructed, while high school sanitation facilities were improved, and four sports grounds and a play area were remodeled. These areas not only improved personal security but they also created spaces to build community security and

cohesion. For example, to facilitate community-based sports and cultural activities, 140 young people and community leaders were equipped with management skills and successfully organized 10 sports, cultural and artistic festivals with widespread community participation.

(iii) One of the project's most notable achievements was the adoption of the human security approach by other stakeholders working to improve citizen security. Specifically, the project's comprehensive and context-specific methodology prompted several other municipalities to replicate the human security approach. Moreover, the Ministry of Public Safety and Justice utilized the human security approach to reduce the proliferation of firearms in 20 other municipalities. The replication and expansion of the project were encouraged by public investments in financial and human capital, as well as technical and financial support from bilateral donors.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project highlighted how the human security approach can result in mutli-sectoral and collaborative strategies that bring together and build upon the inputs of different actors and stakeholders. In this case, Coordination Units were established to unify local governments, UN agencies, and civil society organisations in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the project's activities. This resulted in coherence, eliminated duplication, and advanced integrated solutions that were more effective in providing tangible improvements in the security and quality of life in the participating urban areas. Moreover, by establishing a Coordination Unit in each municipality, the project was able to tailor its support to the context-specific challenges and capacities within each municipality.

In a region where trust between communities and public institutions was lacking, the project emphasized how a mutually reinforcing protection and empowerment framework is essential in strengthening State-society relationships. Top-down protection measures included building the capacity of police forces and the leadership skills of local mayors, while bottom-up empowerment activities ensured that communities were engaged in the development of security policies and community programmes at the municipal level. This created a broader and more comprehensive vision of how institutions and communities identify their respective roles in building citizen security and maintaining peaceful coexistence.