



UN-HABITAT

2nd African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development

28 – 30 July 2008, Abuja, Nigeria



Crime and violence versus employment opportunities in cities and towns

As the world's fastest urbanizing continent, Africa has much to gain from the growth of cities, but it is also at high risk from unchecked chaotic urbanization. Weak national performance contributes too little to the formal urban economy. The infrastructure systems and services are breaking down. Individuals and families are left to fend for themselves, with the result that over 72 percent of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa lives, under the most appalling conditions, in slums and squatter settlements without adequate shelter or basic services.

One inevitable consequence of this is that in many urban communities, those left out, especially the youth are turning to income redistribution measures through crime and other anti-social behaviour. Urban violence and crime are increasing worldwide, giving rise to widespread fear and driving away investment in many cities. This is especially true in Africa where urban gang violence is on the rise.

The cities of Africa are also fast becoming centres of crime. This is caused in large part by the high rate of unemployment, especially amongst young people. In Kenya, those aged 20 to 29 represent 65 percent of the total unemployed. In Lagos state, Nigeria, 70 percent of the unemployed are between 15 and 29.

When unemployment statistics are combined with weak local authorities and failed policing mechanisms the scenarios are disastrous. For example, according to the South African Police Service, in 2000/2001 alone there were over 21,400 cases of murder, nearly 540,000 cases of rape and over 116,700 cases of serious robbery.

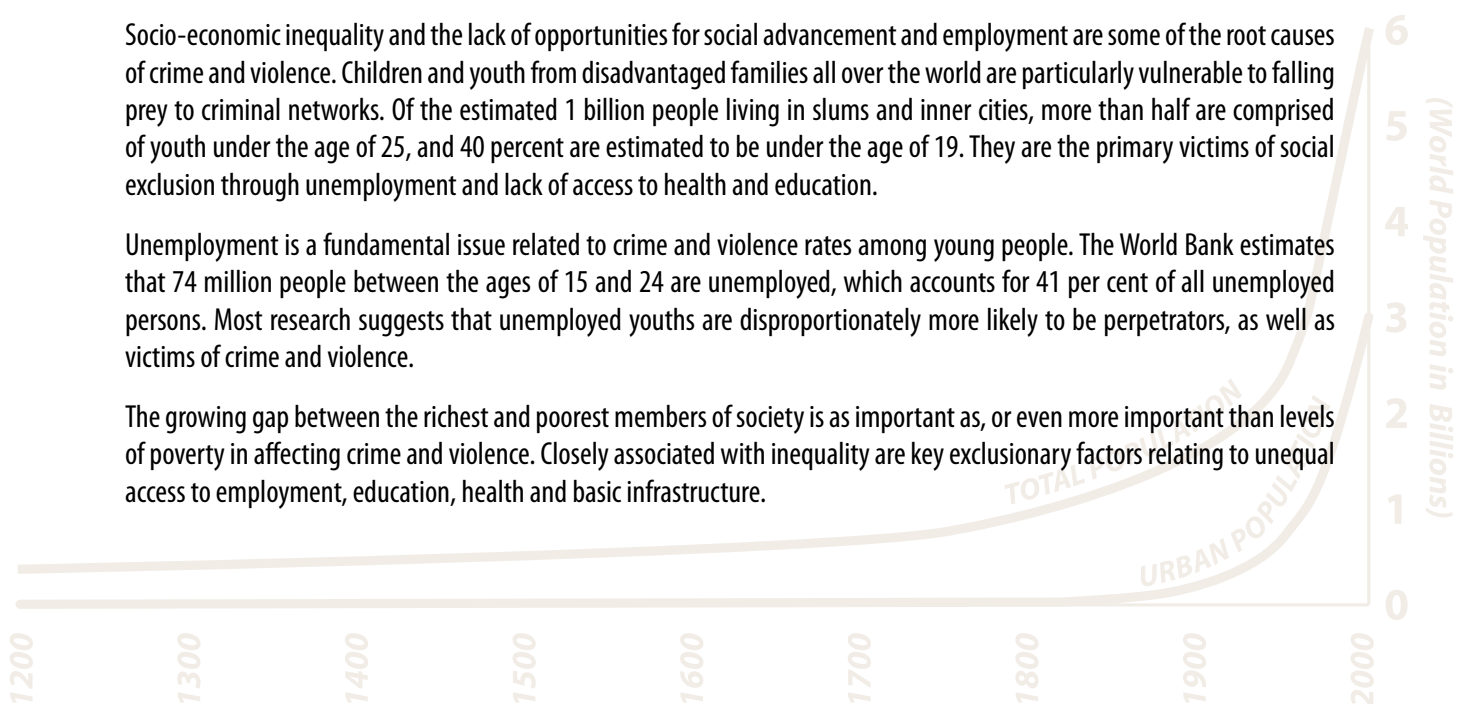
The threats to urban safety pose a huge challenge to governments at all levels. However, since a high proportion of crime takes place in specific locations, the most significant of the levels of response is at the local level.

Urban violence erodes the social capital of the poor. Insecurity affects the poor more intensely, it breaks down socio-cultural bonds and prevents social mobility, thus contributing to the development of urban ghettos and stigmatized neighbourhoods.

Socio-economic inequality and the lack of opportunities for social advancement and employment are some of the root causes of crime and violence. Children and youth from disadvantaged families all over the world are particularly vulnerable to falling prey to criminal networks. Of the estimated 1 billion people living in slums and inner cities, more than half are comprised of youth under the age of 25, and 40 percent are estimated to be under the age of 19. They are the primary victims of social exclusion through unemployment and lack of access to health and education.

Unemployment is a fundamental issue related to crime and violence rates among young people. The World Bank estimates that 74 million people between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed, which accounts for 41 per cent of all unemployed persons. Most research suggests that unemployed youths are disproportionately more likely to be perpetrators, as well as victims of crime and violence.

The growing gap between the richest and poorest members of society is as important as, or even more important than levels of poverty in affecting crime and violence. Closely associated with inequality are key exclusionary factors relating to unequal access to employment, education, health and basic infrastructure.



In Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea that is infamously known for being the worst city in the world to live in, the causes of the escalating levels of crime are attributed to among other factors, poor economic opportunities and ineffective law enforcement. It is estimated that the formal sector provides fewer than 10 percent of jobs in the country. Migration to Port Moresby and internal urban growth have contributed to the expansion of squatter settlements but the authorities have failed to give due recognition to squatter settlements in the city or provide basic services and support to enable the migrants to integrate within the city. This has, in part, given rise to discontent and resentment of authority, and the flourishing of organized gang activity, which provides support and 'employment' opportunities for many migrants in the city.

A major strategy of public and private crime prevention programmes – from Kenya and Papua New Guinea to the US – is targeting unemployed urban youths, especially males, by providing training and job opportunities.

Another example is in Tanzania where the Sungusungu groups established by the communities recruit unemployed youth who receive militia training and various forms of support from the communities and municipalities and operate jointly with the government for law enforcement and protection of people and property.

In Kingston, Jamaica, the creation of a peace park has provided recreational opportunities for young people that were previously absent and contributed to lowering the murder rate in the area.

One of the few direct benefits that slum dwellers receive from globalisation and accordingly urbanization is greater subsequently direct access of aid agencies to support local aid NGOs and governments – and therefore better targeting of pro-poor programmes. Increased "expectations of the possible" might be another benefit, in that improved information might make some slum dwellers seek out livelihood options or opportunities that they might not previously have considered. The more skilled or educated workers may be able to find jobs in international firms at advantageous pay rates, but these people are unlikely to be slum dwellers.

There is a great need to increase employment opportunities through support for the small enterprises and poverty alleviation measures, including the use of appropriate technologies for infrastructure and housing provision that are affordable and provide work opportunities.