Crime Prevention through Sustainable Social Development

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Presented by Daniel Sansfaçon, PhD
Deputy Director General,
International Centre for the Prevention of Crime

I am delighted to be here with you this morning. In fact, I am honoured. For us at the ICPC it is always a challenge and a reward to be invited to speak in these forums. It is a challenge because as a small international centre of knowledge, expertise and cooperation in crime prevention, we are often asked to provide the best knowledge and evidence about what works. The need is as pressing and real and justified as the answers often remain elusive. How to capture the essence of international experience without delivering it in an over-simplistic or patronizing way or without resorting to the cookbook approach is indeed a challenge. It is also a reward because every opportunity we have to meet with policy makers and practitioners, those who do make it happen like you, is an opportunity to learn from your experiences and from your questions.

Let me pause to express ICPC's collective gratitude to all member organizations and governments who have believed in us since 1994, and in particular, to the Government of Canada and the National Crime Prevention Centre. Their support is obviously crucial to ICPC's very existence.   Much more importantly it is a testimony of openness to the world, of a will to learn from what others do, of the belief in interdependency which characterizes this era generally and Canada in particular.

So the question is: how can we make social crime prevention focussed, targeted **and** sustainable? Let us ponder for a few seconds some fundamental implications of this question. Sustainability means identifying successful interventions and replicating them in programs across the country. It also means ensuring the greatest possible return on investment in terms of effectiveness and cost-benefits. Yet, investments in crime prevention fade away when compared to the costs of crime (estimated at over $40 billion some 10 years ago by the then National Crime Prevention Council) and even the costs of criminal justice (estimated at about $10 billion), and funding for specific crime prevention efforts is not assured. No police service, court, school board or hospital faces the requirement for empirically demonstrable results in the same way and to the same degree as does crime prevention. They may be asked to be more efficient, to better measure indicators of effectiveness, to develop clear benchmarks. But their very existence is not at stake. On the positive side, rigour forces those involved in crime prevention to be not just

good but downright excellent. On the negative side, this demand for proof may divert limited resources from service delivery.

Interestingly, not all crime prevention faces this challenge to the same extent. Situational crime prevention is establishing itself as a "science" and surveillance and monitoring systems, target hardening and CPTED are all en vogue. Sometimes rightly so: street lighting, car proofing and crime proofing of banking and identity cards have demonstrated their effectiveness. But not CCTV.

Developmental crime prevention may not be a "science" yet, but it is also well established and has gained much credibility over the last 10 years.

But many still wonder what social crime prevention is and doubt that it works. In fact, using the scientific criteria developed by the Sherman team in the USA[1], community-based crime prevention has not demonstrated its effectiveness.

> "The results of the present review of community-based crime prevention programs are very similar to those of Sherman's (1997) review. We did not find one type of community-based program to be of proven effectiveness in preventing crime. However, there is some empirical evidence to conclude that some community-based interventions are promising and thus are deserving further replication and evaluation. The promising programs are: gang member interventions, community-based mentoring and afterschool recreation."[2]

The trouble is that crime prevention through sustainable social development is not subsumed under community-based crime prevention. Neither is it only school, family, or labour-based, all of which form individual chapters in the book. Crime prevention through social development is all of these, not in the form of separate, distinct and individual projects, but integrated in a coherent set of policies and programs. In that sense, social crime prevention does not exist for these researchers and one of the key reasons is because it does not easily lend itself to evaluation.

Yet, social crime prevention is unquestionably at the very center of all crime prevention. Firstly, other crime prevention interventions, whether situational or developmental, necessarily take place somewhere, in a certain social environment, in a social milieu, in a community. They must be **grounded** in a given neighbourhood and responsive to specific crime and disorder problems, and are therefore context-sensitive. Secondly, they must be **integrated**: when done in isolation or "detached" from their concrete milieu, crime prevention efforts do not, in fact cannot, yield all their benefits. For example, it is well known, although easily forgotten, that measures to prevent residential burglary and repeat victimization by burglars, work best when they also include prevention with youth at risk and early

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[1] In 1997, Congress commissioned a team of expert researchers to produce a state-of-the-art review of "what works" in crime prevention. The report was a landmark review of evaluation studies, based on rigorous criteria of scientific quality. In 2002, Sherman and colleagues updated this review in a book which examined recent studies. Sherman, L.J. et. alii. (2002) *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*. London and New York: Routledge.
[2] Welsh, B.C. and A. Hoshi (2002) "Communities and Crime Prevention" in Sherman, L.J. et alii. (2002).

delinquents, in addition to information to victims, target hardening, focussed investigations, etc. Thirdly, various social and community-based crime prevention efforts have demonstrated their **effectiveness**, even according to the most rigorous criteria of scientific research. Gang intervention to reduce cohesion among gang members, community-based mentoring and after-school recreation have been identified as promising practices (Welsh and Hoshi, 2002: 190); home visitation, school-based child and parent training and multisystemic therapy for young delinquents have been well established (Farrington and Welsh, 2002: 48); and several school-based programs have been demonstrated to work (Gottfredson et al., 2002: 148). More importantly, in a way similar to burglary prevention, these programs are most effective when they involve **partnership and coordination** between the various actors and are part of a comprehensive strategy.

Sustainable development has become a buzzword. Yet, because of its very breadth and scope, the concept faces serious challenges. In a recent article, Victor writes the following:

> Because the concept stresses the interconnection of everything, it has been vulnerable to distortion by woolly thinking and has become a magnet for special interest groups. (…). Instead of bringing together nature, the economy and social justice, sustainable development has spawned overspecialized and largely meaningless checklists and targets.[3]

Social crime prevention, like sustainable development, has come to mean the capacity to tackle the various underlying causes of crime in a comprehensive, integrated way, therefore involving multiple actors and multiple interventions, in an interconnected way.

For example, in the words of the United Nations, social crime prevention is about "promoting the well-being of people and encouraging pro-social behaviour through social, economic, health and educational measures, with a particular emphasis on children and youth, and focus on the risk and protective factors associated with crime and victimisation". It is about integrating crime prevention considerations "into all relevant social and economic policies and programmes, including those addressing employment, education, health, housing and urban planning, poverty, social marginalization and exclusion."[4]

One of the ensuing difficulties for social crime prevention is its apparent lack of focus and clarity. Schools, social services, the health sector, already undertake many activities which are – or may be – contributing to crime prevention: after school programs for children with learning disabilities and problem behaviour, specialized intervention with at-risk families, drug and alcohol abuse prevention programs, to name but a few, are all undertaken by these agencies. While they all play a role in preventing crime, they also serve broader purposes, as do better social housing or youth employment programs, and no one would think of justifying their existence on their crime prevention aspect.

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[3] David K Victor, "Recovering Sustainable Development" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 1, p. 91-92.

[4] ECOSOC, Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime…

Victor goes on to add:

> The trouble with sustainable development is that (…) not enough (effort has been devoted to) articulating and ranking the types of practical measure that are the hallmark of serious policymaking. (Ibid, 95). (… The) concept has practical relevance only if it can accommodate local preferences and capabilities. (…) The only way to craft serious goals is from the bottom up, focusing on responsible systems of government rather than disconnected global processes to do most of the work. (Ibid., 99).

In addition to taking place from the bottom-up, processes should involve responsibility and accountability, in other words include clear and specific tools and indicators.

How can we apply this to make social crime prevention the sustainable component of our global responses to crime that it should be?

1. Defining **clear definitions of roles and responsibilities** between the various orders of government. Most will agree that local governments should be responsible for community safety, establishing local priorities, defining action plans and delivering interventions. But in order to achieve these objectives in an effective and efficient way, they must be supported. Provincial governments have a responsibility to provide tools to exchange knowledge on best practices, training for local coordinators and community safety officers, indicators of prevention and safety and know-how to evaluate local efforts. Providing the overall leadership, the federal government must facilitate and support the development of responsibility centres in the provinces, fund and evaluate promising programs, analyse the conditions of replicability of successful experiences, facilitate the exchange of information on successful and promising practices between provinces, and determine overall global priorities and set targets.

2. **Moving away from an isolated project mentality** to an integrated and comprehensive approach to community safety. Despite accumulated knowledge about the benefits of integrated approaches, responses to crime and disorder problems largely continue to be ad hoc, at best a collection of short-term responses to the issues of the day. Tools exist to conduct community safety audits and to develop and implement action plans, but only too rarely are they used in our communities. Just as we know that integrated and multifaceted responses will best meet the challenges posed by environmental issues, so do they meet the challenges posed by crime and disorder.

3. Implementing **specific and focussed** interventions. General interventions such as youth employment programs, parental education, etc., certainly have crime prevention implications. But crime prevention interventions need to be capable of focussing specifically on risk factors demonstrated to be associated with the particular phenomena targeted. They must focus on the

4. Developing criteria and indicators of **benchmarking**. Where do we want to be in one, two or three years? How will progress be measured? While this speaks of the capacity to evaluate effectiveness of interventions, processes and issues of institutional and community capacity and efficacy must not be left aside. Also required is a thorough reflection on the selected indicators: reductions in crime alone are not enough. This is well known yet easily forgotten. Capacity building among institutional personnel, enhanced social capital in deprived neighbourhoods, and reductions in targeted risk factors, are just as, if not more, important indicators.

5. Moving away from looking at crime itself as detached from the social and historical contexts in which it takes place. Interestingly, when discussing the roots of terrorism, analysts look at the social, economic, ultimately geopolitical context giving rise to terrorists. In addition to specific measures to prevent specific terrorist acts, consideration is also given to ways to preventing people, especially young persons, from becoming terrorists themselves and to affecting the conditions that might be conducive to breeding terrorism. The same obviously applies to ordinary crime. In this sense, crime prevention has obvious educational aspects.

Crime prevention through sustainable social development ultimately means the will and capacity to work differently together, to look at crime and insecurity issues beyond the immediate events and "expected" responses, to move away from prejudice and long held assumptions . Let me end with a reference to a highly counterintuitive research report on teen street gangs and parenting in disadvantaged neighbourhoods recently published by the Rowntree Foundation in the UK.

"Groups of teenagers 'hanging out' on the streets may look intimidating, but young people often gang together with friends as a way of keeping safe and avoiding trouble (…). The research with families in four neighbourhoods of Glasgow found that young people pooled their detailed local knowledge to avoid hazards, including violence from more organised gangs and aggression from adults with drink and drug problems. They took responsibility for keeping themselves and friends safe by moving around in groups and looking out for each other, using mobile phones to stay in touch.
(…)

The study (…) found that parents and children usually identified positive aspects of their neighbourhoods, in spite of high levels of unemployment, low income and drug misuse. These positive aspects were often associated with family, friends and neighbours. It also highlighted a strong commitment among parents to protect children from the worst effects of low income and to keep them safe from local dangers. This sometimes meant placing restrictions on children's movements and activities, including visits to local amenities such as parks and sports facilities. Children were mostly accepting of rules about time and place,

which they took as a sign of their parents' concern. However, as they grew older some young people kept quiet about certain activities, believing they could take care of themselves.

The report calls on national and local policy makers to build on the strengths and aspirations of parents and children in disadvantaged areas, as well as tackling the heightened risks they face, such as drug misuse and antisocial behaviour. For example, policies could do more to support the informal local networks that share information about safe activities and provide families with practical advice and support. Schools are also urged to capitalise on the evidence of parents' positive commitment to discipline and their children's safety to engage them as allies in strategies to raise standards of behaviour."[5]

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5 Seaman, P., Turner K., Hill, M., Stafford, A and M. Walker (2006) *Parenting and children's resilience in disadvantaged communities*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.