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# FROM CITIZEN SECURITY TO FOOD SECURITY: A CROSS-SECTOR DISCUSSION OF VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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## PRESENTERS

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*Rebecca Williams:* Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to today's Agrilinks Webinar from Citizen Security to Food Security, a cross-sector discussion of violence in Central America. We are looking forward to discussing the realities of working in zones of conflict and violence within our development programs.

The context of violence means bringing special tools to bear on how we engage with these communities, from those in rural agricultural settings to those in urban settings. These issues loom large, as a lot of us know, and it is time that we as a development of practitioners start bridging the knowledge gaps that keep us from meeting our food security goals.

My name is Becky Williams and I am a Ph.D. candidate working at the University of Florida. I work with the Feed the Future InnovATE project to look at these issues in depth. I also served in the United States Peace Corps in Honduras, which is also where I conducted my dissertation research. I am very pleased to be moderating this cross-sector dialog today.

Our goal for today's Webinar is to discuss the connection between citizen security and food security, in ways that all of us could engage in development projects successfully, despite violence and conflict. Agrilinks is a knowledge sharing platform for the USAID Bureau for Food Security and is managed by the KDAD Project.

Agrilinks hosts regular seminars and special events to facilitate the exchange of knowledge among practitioners. Visit [Agrilinks.org](http://Agrilinks.org) where you can contribute to online discussions, submit resources, and post to the blog when you become a member. If you want more information, please e-mail [Agrilinks@agrilinks.org](mailto:Agrilinks@agrilinks.org).

Before we go on, I have a few housekeeping items for the event. For our online participants, please know that only the speakers will be speaking today. Please use the chat box to connect to other participants and to ask questions throughout the event. We will note your questions and answer as many as we can during the question and answer portion of the event.

Also, for our online participants, if you have technology issues at any time, please private chat with the KDAD AV tech rather than discussing it in the group chat box. To do so, go to the Attendees box above the chat box. Hover over AV Tech and click Start Private Chat. You can use this feature to initiate conversation with other participants as well, and we certainly encourage you to speak with one another throughout the event.

If you are on Twitter, please share your thoughts using the hashtag #agevent.

We have a fantastic panel of experts here today to discuss this topic. We have Karen Towers, who is the Education Team Leader in the Office of Regional Sustainability in the USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean. Karen specializes in education programming for at-risk youth and workforce development programs in crisis and conflict environments.

Ken Baker is Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Glasswing. Ken has worked abroad with the State Department in over ten countries with Glasswing, and previously served as the Vice President of Corporate Relations at AmeriCare, a large international relief organization.

We have Fernando Rubio from Juárez & Associates, who is currently the Project Director for the Guatemala Lifelong Learning Project. Fernando has extensive experience in international development, having engaged in professional activities including monitoring and evaluation, basic education, teacher development, educational equity and gender, and more.

Finally, we have Isabel Aguilar Umaña, who serves as Regional Technical Advisor in Youth Related Violence Prevention for Catholic Relief Services in the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. Isabel specializes in violence prevention, particularly youth-related violence.

Now, I'm going to turn it over to Karen Towers from USAID to set the background and context for our discussion today. Karen.

*Karen Towers:*

Thanks so much. I just wanted to start by talking a little bit, giving some context on the crime and violence in Latin America. Many of you I'm sure are familiar with this, but I see from the chat box and other things going on that others may not be as familiar. So I have a group of slides that I'm going to take you through, just to provide some context for the ongoing conversation that we will have today.

Next slide: crime and violence is one of the most important public health and public policy challenges facing us at this point I think in Latin America. The problem of violent crime is particularly acute in LAC. LAC is home to 28 percent of the world's murders, despite having only about 9 percent of the world's population. The region

also includes 8 of the top 10 most violent countries in the world, and 40 of the 50 most dangerous cities.

In 2013, San Pedro Sula in Honduras was ranked number one, as the most violent city in the world in a non-active conflict environment. So that tells you about the type of crime and violence that we're being affected by in Central America.

When we look at this particular chart, "Crime and Violence in Central America," that's up on your screen right now, you can see that Central America has seen a marked increase in homicides since 2007. Honduras leads the way with about 90 homicides per 100,000 habitants, followed by El Salvador with 41.2, and Guatemala with 39.9 per 100,000.

By way of comparison, if you look at Mexico, which is on the lower level, it only had about 21.5 homicides per 100,000 in 2012. So you can see how the Northern Triangle countries really experience a tremendous amount of violence.

If you look further at the chart, you can see that Honduras has had an increase in homicides since 2006, and that's been a steady increase. Guatemala has been relatively stable, and El Salvador has seen the most progress within the Northern Triangle, as homicide rates have decreased by about 40 percent following the gang truce in March of 2012. But what this chart doesn't show is that the rate has begun to increase again as the truce has unraveled.

Next slide please: so while its social and economic impacts extend throughout society, violence is extraordinarily regressive in its impact. To quote Gary Haugen's *The Locust Effect*, "In terms of social and economic development, high levels of crime and violence threaten to undermine the best laid plans to reduce poverty, improve governance, and relieve human misery," which is why this particular Webinar is particularly important to looking at development, and also how to deal with the issue protectorally.

Violence has most heavily affected young people, women, minorities and residents of poor areas. Within LAC, males between 15 and 29 are most frequently involved in perpetration as well as victimizations of violence. So when you look at this particular slide, you're seeing the fact that the Americas is particularly affected by violence, but then the difference between men and women, and the fact that the blue figure represents that amount of males that are involved in violence, whereas the smaller red figure represents females. But we can't forget about the females that are

disproportionately affected domestic violence and other types of violence within these communities.

Next slide please: so what's important I think particularly for this particular Webinar is to look at rural versus urban dynamics and also the links between those. I think we have a wonderful group of panelists, who are at where the rubber meets the road in terms of looking at these issues.

We mostly assume that gang violence and drug trafficking is a very urban issue, and when we think about that we think about the cities, San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, other places in Guatemala City or in El Salvador where we're dealing with these issues, but I think we also need to remember the rural side of things. In the rural areas there's a tremendous amount of domestic violence with its families. There's a tremendous amount of trafficking of persons, in terms of looking at young girls, also looking at food insecurity itself and the lack of economic opportunity.

I think we saw in the summer of 2014, with the wave of unaccompanied minors arriving at the Mexican border, that food insecurity and lack of economic opportunity were major drivers of that migration as well as the violence. So looking at the links between those two that are mutually reinforcing are, I think, very important when we look at trying to deal with the issues in these Northern Triangle countries.

Next slide please: I'm an education person, so I always like to look at it from this idea of looking at out of school youth. We see that more than 40 percent of youth have left the school system by secondary school, basically. So you're seeing large out of school youth populations that are neither studying nor working.

Next slide: So when we look at school attendance we see that, for the most part, around 10 or 11 of the secondary school level we have youth leaving the educational system, and either looking for work or migrating or perhaps being recruited into gang violence. There are a couple of reasons why you see large drop-out rates at this particular level.

The first are just pure economic factors, having to go to work, and the fact that the opportunity cost of staying in school is very high for families, where that particular person may make more money being in the workforce and bringing income into the family. Also the fact that secondary schools just tend to be less in supply, and so

they need to travel further distances and perhaps pay for more school supplies. So it's cost prohibitive.

Other reasons, number two could be personal factors, things like sickness and, in the case of women, having to perform household activities and duties, perhaps pregnancy, perhaps marriage at an early age.

Thirdly is crime and violence and insecurity. Our colleagues in El Salvador, in the mission there will remember that we recently did Rapid Education Risk Assessment in El Salvador to look at the links between crime and violence and school attendance and schools themselves, and we see that those schools that are on gang borders of two different gangs can become battlegrounds, and it's extremely difficult for youth to try and go to school in this type of environment. It's an insecure path to school. Being in school can sometimes also be threatening. So you see drop-outs because of that.

Then we can talk about just general quality as well. The quality of schooling in Central America, especially at the secondary level, many times is not relevant at the secondary level to the work life. Also, just the quality of teachers in general is an issue.

So looking at this as a whole, it's great to have so many panelists that are working in different sectors. We know that violence impacts individuals, communities, institutions, industries, governments in these communities, and it really does take a protectoral approach to think about how to deal with that from a developmental lens.

I look forward to talking and to listening today to some of the other presenters, to talk about how we are doing that at the grass roots level. Thank you very much.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Karen. That was wonderful in setting the stage for what is going on in the Central American context regarding violence. We'd like for each of our presenters to have a moment to introduce themselves and discuss the work that they are doing in this region. So if you could advance one slide please. Ken, would you give us an indication of the work that you're doing and the violence issue that you might be facing.

*Ken Baker:* We have our headquarters here in El Salvador and we have offices throughout Central America. We have projects running throughout Latin America. We are very active in education, health, and

community development. In community development, a lot of that has to do with volunteering, getting citizen participation in the projects that we have. A lot of programs have to do with youth and working in the public schools system. Also, we work in public clinics, both urban and rural areas.

Much of our work is in the Northern Triangle, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. We've had to deal with the challenges of violence for a long time now. We do feel that it has gotten worse, that it has gotten more challenging in the areas that we work, in both urban and rural settings.

We work very closely with the private sectors, to get them involved, and we try to change public schools into – try to make them into community schools, so that they can be in session for more time than the four hours that the children are typically in, so they stay in school and stay off the streets, and are involved in educational and life skills improvements and programs. So we work very closely with the private sector, both multinational and local companies, and with USAID and the U.S. government who provide us programs.

In the rural areas we work with agricultural companies, coffee and sugar. As it has been noted, the rural have their set of challenges, where they're more challenging actually than in the urban areas. I'm sure we'll get into that discussion more as the conversation continues.

But thank you again and I look forward to the discussion.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you very much, Ken. Let's pass it off to Fernando from Juárez & Associates. Fernando, can you tell us a little bit about your work?

*Fernando Rubio:* Hi, everyone. It's very nice to be here. We implemented the largest educational project in Guatemala. It has two areas. One is certainly reading and we ....

The other thing is ...

These are people who left school ... probably finished either primary education or the ninth grade of secondary education, but it wasn't mandatory for everyone.

We also target populations coming from ... backgrounds. We conducted at the beginning of the project ....

It did allow us to identify numerous issues related to youth violence and .... Then those who are working usually ... a salary. Sometimes they work under conditions that are related to....

Gender balance is also important, particularly in ... setting. Especially for young women, gender balance is an important issue that we deal with.

...

However, the western islands are located into the project, most of the project, so this is ... common. We have found that the youth that participated supposed to.... They ...consumers or they may be sometimes ...

Human trafficking is also an issue. Illegal immigration is –

*Rebecca Williams:* Fernando, I'm so sorry to interrupt you, but you're a little bit hard to hear. Would you mind speaking a little bit more clearly, maybe back up from the microphone just a little bit?

*Fernando Rubio:* How do I sound, better?

*Rebecca Williams:* That's definitely a little better.

*Fernando Rubio:* I was indicating that youth face trafficking-related violence in a number of traffic situations. One is a woman ... legal immigration and also woman trafficking related to ... probation, sexual ... probation. Drug trafficking becomes and issues ... in Guatemala and Mexico. That also exposes a difficult situation.

Now do we deal with this? One of the things we found is that youth participation is low, and a high number of youth indicated they don't want to participate, as high as 40 percent among those that didn't finish basic education. There is a lot of mistrust, part of it from governments failing to provide services in the past, but also because this is a post-conflict area, and there is a historical situation with people coming from outside of the community found mistrust.

...

We have then youth and comfort spaces, which are safe spaces for others to have a safe environment in which they can interact and participate. We are building these ... around these issues, and we

are helping to provide alternative education services, workforce development, and training... that youth are demanding, and they're trying to link this education and workforce development efforts, move the....

*Rebecca Williams:* Fernando, we need to go ahead and move on to Isabel for our introduction. Would you do me a big favor and go back through the audio setup wizard? There are some people that are still having trouble hearing you. Thank you, Fernando.

Let's pass it on to Isabel. Isabel, can you give us a brief introduction to the work that you're doing?

*I. Aguilar Umaña:* Hello, everyone. As you already know, I work for Catholic Relief Services in the regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean. We started to develop a regional strategy in 2015, trying to scale up our models, our methodology that we have developed successfully in El Salvador since five years ago.

Can you move up please to the next slide?

First, it's important to underline that our philosophy that's used in even the poorest and most violent neighborhoods have the power to change the direction of their lives and of their communities. Our holistic approach is focusing on youth at-risk, so the academic, social and personal challenges they face, by providing concrete opportunities for employment, education and leadership.

Our youth strategy has three main pillars. One is provide direct services to CRS and our partners. We have been developing our main programs or models, which are the YouthBuild model. We are now developing it in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Mexico; the Youth ... Groups, which means savings on internal lending communities, especially for youth, and, as a complement, mentoring... at Strong Families. With these three methodologies, YouthBuild, Youth Groups, and Strong Families, we design a specific way to approach the most at-risk youth, including gangs and former gang members in El Salvador, and our model is called Second Chance.

We started with this model in El Salvador, but we are nowadays implementing it in Guatemala, in well recognized, red, hot spots that go into Yucatan. There is a component of how to build evidence or effectiveness, which means our research agenda. Now we are conducting a randomized control trial to assess how our YouthBuild model is really working. We know that 80 percent of

the youth that participated in our program get a job, start a business or go back to school by the end of the program.

Our third pillar is how to strengthen the government to sponsor youth work for development and violence prevention programs, which of course include engaging with the private sector to ensure that all training programs are demand-driven, and of course to place young people in jobs. This means clearly an entrance strategy.

Can you move to the next slide please?

Finally, as I mentioned, we are now moving with the support of the Inter American Development Bank. We are implementing a randomized control trial to demonstrate the impact of our YouthBuilder model, which CRS develops in alliance with YouthBuild International and with many other partners in the region like ..., like ..., et cetera.

Also, we have developed tools to measure resilience in youth. It's worth it to mention our YouthBuild program has tools that assess youth resiliency three times during the training course. This allows us to really collect evidence on how we are helping these young people to change their lives and, as part of our leadership's program, to contribute to help change the life of their community.

*Rebecca Williams:*

Thank you, Isabel. That was very interesting. I think we all are going to want to know more about what exactly you did in your projects to have such a success rate of students or young people at risk of violence going back into education or getting a job. That's something that's of interest to all of us.

So we're going to open up the floor for questions. We have some questions that are already prepared, which is what we will begin with. However, if you have a question for the panelists, please feel free to write that into the chat window. We'd also like to ask you to tell us, those of you working in agriculture and education or in any development projects: how has violence affected your projects or your ability to get the work done that you need to in these areas?

So let's go ahead and start asking some questions. Ken, if we could start with you, you have a large number of staff that are working in the field in El Salvador. I think you told me over 70 people working largely in education, and working with violence was not necessarily the aim of your project until it started becoming a theme in your project. So can you tell us: how did violence affect

your project and your staff, and why did you start getting involved in trying to incorporate work on youth violence into your program?  
Ken, I'll pass it off to you.

*Ken Baker:*

Great. Thank you, Becky. Our focus is on education and health programs. Years ago we started seeing the need and, really, when we look at what were the factors in the violence that was gripping the Northern Triangle countries we found that education and even employment were just two of the three of the largest factors, and one of the largest factors being a sense of belonging for youth.

A lot of this we attribute to the migration that has been so intense coming from these three countries. It is really behind broken homes. So we became more focused on getting the private sector and also parents to get a lot more involved in the education in both rural and urban areas. We find that through different clubs, through different competitions kids develop pride. That can be anything from a glee club to debate club to leadership clubs to girls' clubs, where they are matched with Glasswing staff and also with volunteers from the private sector, who meet with them weekly to prepare them either for competitions or just to work with them on developing their life skills and educational skills.

What we've found is we were trying to extend the school day, as I mentioned, but also become a substitute for, in a lot of cases where the kids were most at risk is where they would be going to empty homes or out on the street, instead of where the gangs do provide a sense of belonging, that we could provide that and also a sense of hope.

As Becky says, over the last number of years the violence has gotten more challenging, and I just wanted to address that part of the question. We have found for our staff that it is imperative that our programs are – we don't call them violence prevention programs. We do not talk about gangs in our program. What we talk about is opportunity for youth, and we have to keep our neutrality and our space, because if we are ever seen as passing information or being a part of anything from the press to the police to other organizations that are taking on the gangs, our staff are under serious threat, as well as some of our students and our volunteers.

We do work in communities that aren't the most red areas, but we do work in the pink areas, where it is critical and the toll if you don't do this right is immense because people get killed and threatened. We have teachers and others that have been threatened.

So keeping a space has been the key to having our staff safe over the last nine years.

I can say that in the schools we have found that they respect – gangs and delinquents, we find that they leave us be as long as they don't see us as a threat. They let students stay in the programs. We have had very good success in the urban setting with this. Not to say that our students haven't been threatened, that we haven't had to face things.

It's interesting that in the rural areas, where we have staff working in clinics, health clinics, we've had greater problems. Just about a month ago we had three staff members from a couple rural clinics in one area leave the country without even getting their last paychecks because of the threats that had been coming to them. I'm not sure if it's more they're sitting ducks or if there's just less going on, the factors; we're really trying to figure it out ourselves right now, but the rural areas that we work in, in the three countries, we do have to address violence on a weekly basis. Thank you.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Ken. That was very interesting. There are so many interesting points that you brought up about the issues with migration and broken families and issues of sense of belonging. One of the things that you said that really stood out to me is this issue of having to kind of navigate, almost a coexistence with the more violent forces in the gang so that you're able to get your work done. Can you speak a little bit more to that aspect? Does that ever cause an issue with your programs, if you are trying to stay away from any type of police action or anything? Does that ever cause you guys an ethics problem or any type of an issue there?

*Ken Baker:* I volunteer every week in a public school that's in one of the most difficult – well, it's a very well known difficult area, but the more difficult areas – and I'm sure the other panelists can speak to this – are the areas where there's sort of a gang toss up, where one gang is not in control. That is probably the most dangerous area that we face.

This area is completely controlled by one of the most famous gangs here ..., population 7,000. What happens is the government comes in and because it's high profile they like to do roundups and they like to make examples of them, and also the media likes to cover it. What happens also is that they use other vehicles and other ways to get information of what's happening in that neighborhood, because the gang heads of El Salvador are from there. They're calling the shots from prison.

And it's not just there, but we always have to ask – we do not directly talk to gang members. We will talk to community leaders and have our staff say, "Hey, do you know Glasswing has nothing to do with anything," and when these roundups happens we just kind of get the word out there again, like, "Glasswing is absolutely neutral and has nothing to do with anything confronting the community or the gangs," because, yes, that could lead to very serious consequences, especially for an organization like ourselves that relies a lot on volunteers. If we have a bad incident, that's going to hurt our ability to get others.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Ken. That's very interesting. Fernando, can we get you to make some comments on this as well? Because in your programs you often will deal with violence as an unexpected part of your projects, and you use a masculinities approach in your work. So what does masculinities have to do with the situation of violence, and how is that related to the development work that you're doing? Fernando?

*Fernando Rubio:* I'm here. When we first started this project we didn't perceive violence to be an issue. However, we found out soon enough that violence was a very important issue.... One of the things was related to gender-based violence. This was related to a very important part... male and female behavior.

So young men and men in general consider violence against women to be part of the natural behavior, which there was a normalization of violence on the part of men. Women felt by and large that it was natural that they may be subject to violence.

So one of the things that we are doing throughout this piece is trying to put together an approach that has been employed by USAID in different projects, in which we try to ... and teach young men different ways to be a male. This is called the new masculinity ..., how to behave in different ways...- particularly young men when their particular behavior may be considered a threat, maybe characterize violence or gangs is not. So this is a new development... government.

One of the things that we also do in this is organizing spaces for the youth. Those safe spaces, we call them comfort spaces. They allow the youth to have space in which they can interact. They can share different things. And those spaces provide a place in which they can feel at ease dealing with different issues including... environment.

The other thing that is important to have is that part of the issue of dealing with violence goes right along with lack of education. Many of these participants didn't finish primary education. Our schooling for them is about fourth grade education. So we need to use approaches in which ... is part of the issue, as part of the solution, but also using ... model approach, a ... approach that allows youth to participate even though the women still are not particularly ..., so a ...-based approach and more participatory, like a model activity that allows them to express themselves, whereas if you have reading-based materials then often feel that they don't have the required space to do so.

So it's a combination of basic education activities around the school, with a particular approach that allows to be fully engaged.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Fernando. That is very interesting. You and Ken both discussed games, soccer or other sports, are getting young men involved in that way. But you also both mentioned the lack of sense of belonging and the pride that comes with being part of a gang or part of a violent group.

I've read some interesting research that's saying that especially in these Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras that education is starting to become feminized in a sense that young men are seeing education as something that only girls do, that it's something that's not manly. So what do you do in that situation and have you seen that?

Isabel, can you speak to that? I know you work directly with at-risk youth.

*I. Aguilar Umaña:* I can't hear the question. Sorry. Can you repeat it a little bit?

*Rebecca Williams:* Sure, Isabel, no problem. My question is: you work with at-risk youth directly and you've had quite a few years of experience with that. Have you seen any issues with young men seeing education as something that only girls do, that it's something that's more feminine? If so, how do you get through to young men to participate in school or in other activities when they're already participating in something like violence?

*I. Aguilar Umaña:* According to my experience, I think both men and women look for education as an opportunity that is missing in their life. For diverse reasons they know that a school can provide them an opportunity to improve their life, but they cannot have access to education due

to poverty or due to violence or due to the absence of educational coverage. Basically we are talking about secondary levels.

I think masculinity and the way machismo culture is affecting or inspiring youth to be violent does not pass exactly through education or not education. They recognize in general, both in general, women and men; they recognize that going to school is important. When you interview or when you share... with them, they often tend to feel bad because of that lack of opportunity.

So I think what is missing is that coverage or educational coverage in many areas here, especially in the Northern Triangle countries, the system is only covering primary education, not the secondary level education. So it's precisely the level in which adolescents have to go to school.

Also, poverty is a key factor. Many residents, particularly in Guatemala, nowadays are not going to school due to the lack of resources. Their parents are not able – families are not providing them all the resources they need to go to school, and due to that they are abandoning the school. They are assuming informal jobs or, in many cases, women are in marriages or they are forming new families very, very young, especially in these countries.

So to summarize a little bit, I think it's not a matter of if you are a man or a woman. Both appreciate the opportunity, if they have it.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Isabel. That's very interesting. We'd like to ask the audience and you can just type in the box: is anybody else out there using the masculinities approach with young men, whether to address gender-based violence, to address participation in agriculture or in education or in any other way? What do you see as happening with these masculinities-based approaches?

For our panel, while we're getting responses on that, I'd like to go back to Ken. Ken, we have a question for you. A couple people have been talking about games and such, and so we have a question from Madeline. Are you able to employ or make any use of former gang members in your work? If so, are they able to help you in any way in dealing with these issues that you're facing in your project? Ken.

*Ken Baker:* Thank you. We do not have a specific focus or program that tries to integrate gang members and ex-gang members. For us, at least what we've seen and what we've researched with other organization is that it's very complicated. As I mentioned, our

programs have school programs, life skill programs and the various... programs. The ones that we have are open to everyone and anyone that wants to participate, be interested and be a positive part of the program.

There are organizations that deal directly with ex-gang members and try to find employability, and my hat's off to them because that's really complicated work. Ours is we don't know who's a gang member. We don't know who's an ex-gang member. We have employment programs, job readiness programs. Everyone is able to join them. But, as I said, one way to keep ourselves insulated that we found over the years is to not really address the situation.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Ken. That's very interesting and probably very good advice for many of our people working in projects that are having to deal with violence, but don't want to directly engage with gang members.

Karen, can I pass it off to you as far as the cross-programmatic view of this issue of violence? Several of our panelists have talked about the connection to education, but can you give us a little bit more on how a cross-sector approach to violence can be important?

*Karen Towers:* Sure, maybe just to mention that USAID also is very specifically under our CARSI program. CARSI, for those of you that don't know what it stands for, is Central America Regional Security Initiative. We've been looking very closely at what we're calling the community-based approach, so trying to identify communities that are particularly affected by gang violence of violence in general, and looking at the different program areas that we as USAID work in, and that would be education, health, democracy in government, economic growth, environment, to take a look at how we're programming in those areas so that we're overlapping and making sure we're looking at the community as a whole.

For example, I work in education. We talked a bit in this. Fernando and Ken and Isabel talked a lot about education. So, for example, perhaps the first thing you need to do is more on the DG side of things, the democracy and governance side of things, to look at: is that community stable enough to work in? Is the violence at such a point where some other development programs really can't work yet? And looking at dealing with that specific case from the beginning.

If it is relatively stable and we can work in other programming areas, then how do we look at some of the particular sectoral things

that are happening there? Perhaps in a school-based project we would look at: how can we use the school as a safe place for youth to gather and to learn and to study? On the health side, we need to be looking at things like early marriage or marriage in general, early pregnancy, really looking at also kind of the psycho-social services that we can offer in a community like this, where almost every community member is somehow being exposed to violence, whether it's outside of their homes, in addition to inside of their homes, obviously looking at the economic growth projects and looking at opportunities for employment, which is really important, giving people an alternative in these communities.

A lot of times youth are looking towards gangs to provide some kind of stability, either economically or in another way, and providing other routes for employment is important. Also, obviously, in the rural areas as well, looking at food security and the other issues that we're dealing with that.

So I think it's really important for projects to talk with each other like we're doing here today, I think, about how we can share lessons learned as well as really have ways to refer youth from one project to another. We realize that they need a lot of support and there's a social safety net kind of aspect to things that I think you can only do if you're really working cross-sectorally and not just in kind of a stovepipe lane. Thanks very much.

*Rebecca Williams:*

Thank you, Karen. Taking a step back to our question about masculinity, we got a very good comment from Christina Manfred. "The USAID funded Gender Agriculture from Policy to Practice, the GAPP project, delivers masculinity workshops to men and women in Western Honduras. The project aims to improve policies at a local level and with in-rural credit institutions to make them more equitable. The program provides gender equality training, but the focus on masculinity is a result of the recognition that we often overlook men in a discussion of gender equality. The project has been successful in establishing more equitable credit rules and in getting women's economic initiatives funded by local governments."

Thank you for that comment, Christina.

So how do we integrate the lessons from education that we are hearing into projects such as agriculture? Some of you work more in urban areas, some of you more in rural areas, and many of our participants here today are interested in food security. So what are

some of the takeaways from your projects that could be extended to agricultural education or agricultural projects?

Can I pass it off to you, Ken?

*Ken Baker:*

Sure. With the programs we have that actually the kids, the youth are even hungrier for educational opportunities, all sort of opportunities for learning in rural settings. There's typically less aid that gets to the rural areas, and we find that we can also have a greater impact because they may be more behind in certain academic aspects.

We know that with our staff and with our volunteers, when we get out in our more rural areas, parts where you have programs with the agriculture industry, sugar, coffee, even in textiles, that they really take to the programs. They love to – they take pride in them and we do try to do as much program as we can in those areas. It's just more challenging because of the distances and the programs have, obviously, less students in a much greater area.

But the same things that we use for the urban areas we find are successful when we work with the different businesses in their areas or sphere of influence. We also find that field trips or just exposure to outside things, technology, they really take to it and we talk to them about coming to the bigger towns and participating with the kids from the urban areas. As well we try to do interchanges; our competitions in both rural and the urban areas represented. It's amazing when we come together, those interchanges, how there's a real transfer of experience and learning that's involved in those areas.

So I would say our main program doesn't refer so much. We do have different kinds of signs of violence in the rural areas, but we found that in the rural areas if we can have a program that is strong and consistent that we can actually make a bigger impact in the rural areas.

*Rebecca William:*

Thank you, Ken. That's very interesting. In the chat window we're seeing a lot of interesting comments from two of our presenters, Fernando and Isabel, both talking quite a bit about mistrust in a community, about the machismo culture as risk factors for violence.

So, Isabel, can I pass it off to you to discuss a little bit more about the issues facing rural areas and how those are maybe different

than the issues facing urban areas? Or are the violence issues the same or how are they related? Can you speak a little bit about that?

*I. Aguilar Umaña:* Yes, of course. I think it depends on what you consider rural areas and of course which country you are talking about. For example, regarding the Northern Triangle of Central America you have to consider in El Salvador rural areas are quite different than in Guatemala and in Honduras.

In West Guatemala, for example, you have all the Mayan culture, which is important to consider if you want to really design an integral approach, and in Honduras you have to consider it as well. Even though in those countries the indigenous populations are less or are not well recognized, there are, for example, the ... descendents, the ... culture and the other descendent groups and also the ... culture, et cetera. So it depends. That's my first key point. It depends on who and where are you considering your intervention.

But I have to say that as a general trend that lethal violence is an urban aspect of all the levels of violence and crime we are facing. With the homicide rates, if you want to ... the trend, are localized in the cities or in the municipalities around the cities like in the area known a Gran Salvador or the municipalities around Guatemala City, for example. Also, it is the same pattern for San Pedro Sula or ... or....

But as a general characteristic, we need to recognize that in rural areas, villages, our crimes are not well registered due to the weakness of our security and justices. So it implies that people do not go to the security, public ministry or the police forces to say that something has happened. Some trends can be – we are misunderstanding that.

On the other hand, we can see that in many countries the rural areas are the main scenario for domestic and gender-based violence. It of course affects mainly children, adolescents, women, and youth. As you may know, all domestic abuses, all sexual abuses and gender-based violence tend not to be considered in these countries as a public issue. Families tend to avoid facing these sources of violence.

So we can say that in rural areas, who are the main sources of violence? One is all the violence related with gender aspects like domestic violence, violence against women, violence against children and youth is considered, unfortunately, as a private issue.

In the urban areas, I don't want to let you consider that we do not have these sources of violence, but in the urban areas the main strains of violence and crime are lethal, violence of course with guns. Guns unfortunately kill people being involved in that dynamic, both as victims or perpetrators.

Finally, I want to underline that in the rural areas we need to consider two aspects of the dynamics, sociopolitical and economic dynamics, which is the presence of organized crime, especially in Honduras and Guatemala. If you look at a map of our countries, the routes for all kinds of traffic, illicit traffic are there, and also a source of conflict and ... violence, which is the lack of governance related with certain industries.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Isabel. We've heard a lot about the issues of violence themselves, which can be very overwhelming when you hear all of them, broken families, migration, immigration, gang-related violence, gender-based violence, rural, urban. It can be really overwhelming. So this last 25 minutes that we have, let's take a shift and start talking a little bit more about the things that you as panelists have done that have been successful and how they were successful. What did you do?

If we could start with Karen, can you tell us from the AID perspective, have you seen any projects that have been particularly successful at addressing violence? What did they do and how can we transfer those successes to our other projects? Those of you in the audience, please feel free to comment on this as well.

*Karen Towers:* Sure. I just shared in the chat bar a study that was recently conducted by our CARSI team here on what works in reducing community violence, which I think is a nice report because it looks at cross-sectoral areas of things that people are trying to do in these areas, from community policing to employment programs to food security programs, to other types of programs of what we see is really working.

One of the things that comes out pretty clear in this report and in projects in general I think is cognitive behavior therapy, recognizing that these youths are usually coming to projects that we're all working in, being affected by an extreme amount of violence, whether it be in the home or in their community, and realizing that we need to help them and counsel them through a lot of those things. So cognitive behavioral therapy, also looking at how do we help these youths kind of work through anger

management issues and other things that will make them kind of stop and think before they act.

The most successful projects that I've seen are ones that are open-minded, that sit down and listen to the youth that are coming in and know that they're coming with a lot of problems, and so they need to stop and think about that. For example, we can't expect someone that's going to be teaching life skills to be prepared to do also counseling. Yet we need to help that particular facilitator or trainer to kind of think through how to deal with those particular issues, or within the school setting with the teacher of how to deal with those anger management issues and other issues that are happening with that particular youth, also to look for warning signs kind of within the youth, of things to look out for. So I would say cognitive behavioral therapy.

The other thing I would say is starting as early as possible. I know a lot of our USAID programs tend to start 16 to 24 or 15 to 24 if we're looking at employment programs or other types of programs, but I think we need to start as early as possible, recognizing the fact that if you catch youth earlier, ten or even earlier, you're going to be more effective in terms of working with them, along with them was they're dealing with the issues in their community.

So those are the two things I would say, CBT and also early intervention if possible.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Karen. That's very helpful. Fernando, I'd like to ask you the same question. What have you done that has worked well, and how can we transfer that to our own projects?

*Fernando Rubio:* A couple of things, first what we would do different. The one thing that we would do different would be to design the ... from startup with the violence prevention component. We put in that after the evidence showed that we needed to. So we know now to design violence project interventions with that in mind.

A couple of things on violence prevention, one is these safe spaces for youth. We found out that there were no spaces in ... for youth to participate. For men it was mostly soccer or football, and no spaces for women other than church. So creating and building spaces so youth can be safe and they can feel safe are important.

Building and integrating into our alternative education programs the ... that are political violence. We have about 20 percent of all participants who are female with children. They get pregnant early

on or they were abandoned by their husband or they were abused. It's hard to determine which are the victims..., but the fact is that girls and women face additional hardships when they have a child to take care of. So we are introducing a ... for young women with one or more children, so that they can first attend to the education and the education activities, and second, they have to bring the children with them.

We are sort of providing child attention for those children, so that young mothers attend and participate in the education plans or the education activities, while volunteers are attending those children. Otherwise, we may not only have a victim of some sort of gender-based or sexual-based violence, but they become additional value to the family through participating in the education center.

So I would say those two things. One is creating spaces in which youth can feel safe and they can participate in a safer environment. And two is targeting victims of violence, so ..., particularly women who oftentimes are at a bigger disadvantage and they ... to participate in these programs.

*Rebecca Williams:* Fernando, I'd like to ask you one more question. When I did my research the past couple of summers in Honduras, I saw something that was different from my Peace Corps time, in that there were many women soccer teams in Western Honduras where I was conducting my work. It seemed that almost every rural community had one, even if there were only 11 or 12 people that participated.

So we have a question from the audience, from Madeline. "Are there any efforts to get women and girls involved in sports or activities such as those to help them with their self-esteem or to get more involved?"

*Fernando Rubio:* Definitely. There are soccer teams with women in Guatemala, but mostly in the rural settings, particularly in the school settings women usually do basketball. What we're doing is that we integrate different sort of activities, ... activities. That may involve games or that may involve sports or some other sort of physical activity that allows both males and females to participate.

We are not doing women sport activities at this time, but it is being proposed by several youth that they would be interested in participating in a sport-like activity. So we're just starting the planning phase for the next year of the .... So next year we may have some sport activities for women or ... sport activities for males. So certainly that's part of the solution and we may have

those women sport activities in the future, in addition to the more physical activities that they are developing now, game-based for women that allows and motivates participation with women.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Fernando. I know that Ken also has sports as one of his interventions. And, Karen, you have seen A Ganar, which is a sports-based program through USAID. Why don't you tell us a little bit about what that has to do with violence reduction?

*Karen Towers:* A Ganar is a sports-based workforce development program that's been supported in the Caribbean and in Guatemala and Honduras for about eight years. It just recently ended, but it used sports as a vehicle – as really a unifying theme to teach life skills, to teach workforce readiness skills, math and basic literacy skills, and then they moved into the more technical training and internships and placement and a job.

Just to note, we're doing a five-year longitudinal impact evaluation study of that particular program. The program ended in September of 2015, but we we'll be having some mid-term results from Guatemala and from Honduras actually this summer, and a year from now we'll be having long-term data. The idea is to follow the youth over time to see whether or not their employment is better, and if so how, looking at their salary rates and also whether it's informal employment or not, whether they went back to school or for further study or not or if they started their own business, also looking at risky behavior.

We're also actually looking at the sports components, whether or not sports made a difference in terms of how successful the program was, and whether or not that's a development tool we should be looking at in all the different sectors. Thanks so much.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Karen. We have a question that I think might be interesting to pose to the entire audience, to chat and to put into the chat window. "Has anybody tried music as an intervention for youth violence?"

There was an interesting comment here by Ricardo Brown. Ricardo says that when he used to live in Honduras, between '92 and '98 and a little bit after that, it was most common that people would talk about soccer or football, as most of us call it, and when he went back to Honduras for two weeks in 2014 it was a shock that the main topic was now not football. The main topics were horrible crime stories.

I must say that for my own Ph.D. work I was not anticipating studying violence until it became a surprising theme to my work.

We have about 15 minutes. So thank you to those that have shared questions and comments. We have a couple more questions left. I'd like to turn it over to Ken. I'd like to ask you, Ken, in your opinion, should we just try to avoid the violence issues or should we address them head-on? Is it possible to avoid them? Why should we integrate violence prevention or youth violence reduction into our development programs?

Oh, I think I lost Ken. So let's go ahead and turn that question over to Isabel. Isabel, should we just ignore violence and try to stay away from it or should we address it head-on? Is it even possible to avoid it? And why should we be worried about this in our development projects?

*I. Aguilar Umaña:* I think we need to be worried about violence because sometimes it undermines the capacity of an initiative to move forward, especially regarding the amount of violence that we are looking at in El Salvador, for example, or in Honduras, in some places in Honduras. Violence is related with development from a structural perspective. Poverty in itself is not a risk factor, but of course many aspects of poverty are related with major risk factors of being violent or of being a victim of violence.

So I think we need to consider that if we do not achieve security – of course we're word security as from the democratic perspective – if we don't achieve security levels that allow people to live, to develop themselves to really be agents of their own lives and their own communities, to shape their own future, we are not going to achieve our development goals. That's why nowadays the sustainable development goals recognized that. I don't remember exactly, but 16 or 17 goals, and each recognized that we need to really peaceful relations within community groups and institutions to really shape our development.

On the other hand, we need to analyze further our ... from a more direct perspective the effects of poverty ... for violence. For example, here in Guatemala, malnutrition and under-nutrition is related with the amounts of migration. The ways that migrants are traveling means a ... full of violence, of sources of violence. So I think we need to really consider that both are coming together, and if we want to really design integral approaches we need to take into account the main sources of violence that conflict that are in our areas of interest.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you, Isabel. I think that's great advice. We have one last question, but before we ask please be sure to fill out the polls that you see here. I'd like to pass this last question off to Ken. Let me see if Ken is back and has his microphone working. Yes he does.

Our last question for you, Ken, if you could help us out: in what ways might food security or nutrition interventions best integrate with the work that you are doing or vice versa? How can your work integrate with the food security field, specifically regarding the issues surrounding violence?

*Ken Baker:* Thank you, Becky. I think one of the major challenges in everything that we face in education and health and community and with violence, the major challenge is that it's so comprehensive. I know one of the major initiatives in El Salvador a time ago was nutrition and how to get nutrition in the schools. If kids aren't getting the proper nutrients, they're not going to learn. They're not going to participate. We see it in our programs and we've seen it in studies.

One way is always to look at ways to integrate the public schools in programming, because that's really one of the basics of a community. So nutrition is a critical area of that. And working with the private sector in the more rural areas, see how you can make your program development to them and the employees. There are not as many private sector out there, but if you can show, which is one of the things that we try to do, show them how important it is to have a strong community around where they do business, you can get support from them, and you can also use them as a mouthpiece to – you know, it's a one-stop shop for hundreds of thousands of individuals in some communication campaigns and also deliver them. So it's a huge ... in the private sector in that area as well.

I'm sorry. I lost it for a second there. But one of the important things that I think increases success is that public schools can be safe areas, and that they can be adopted by the communities around them with that culture or the private sector, even the rural areas. It is a great way to provide safe spaces and opportunities to work on different practices for youth.

*Rebecca Williams:* Thank you very much, Ken. Some important takeaways from today that we've heard from our participants is in starting early with youth violence prevention, the role of cognitive behavioral therapy, a lot of interest in getting young people involved in sports and

education. We had a lot of interesting comments about getting youth involved in music, providing opportunities for other activities, training staff in skills to deal with violence, development project staff, because in these areas that are experiencing high levels of violence it's inevitable that violence is going to have an impact on your project, so prepare your staff for that.

Provide safe spaces for youth. Look at gender-based interventions, and the different types of violence between rural and urban areas, creating community and just providing young men with a sense of identity and trust in the community. So those are some really interesting and important points.

I'd like to thank everyone for joining, and a special thanks to the Feed the Future InnovATE project and our speakers, Ken from Glasswing, Fernando from Juárez & Associates, Karen from USAID, and Isabel from Catholic Relief Services.

Before you sign off, please take the closing poll you see on your screen. For those in the room, please fill out the quick evaluation form. Information from both help Agrilinks improve these learning events.

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There are several publications on this topic that InnovATE has put up on their website about education and preventions for youth violence, the drivers behind youth violence, and we will be soon publishing a rather extensive thematic study on the drivers behind youth violence and how development interventions can address these issues. So please take a look at those as well as the three blogs that we posted on this topic, which you can find at [Agrilinks.org](http://Agrilinks.org).

Thank you to everybody and we hope that this was a productive use of your time and an interesting event for all of you. Thank you again to our presenters.

*[End of Audio]*