

Key challenges of security provision rapidly urbanising contexts: offender and police experiences from Kathmandu Valley and Terai Regions of Nepal

Urban violence not only affects people's health and wellbeing, it has a devastating impact on the social fabric and economic prospects of entire cities (Moser 2005). It can also set recursive cycles of vulnerability in motion: violence-affected individuals find it increasingly harder to be gainfully employed, while poverty is sustained through generations.

However, the ways in which violent crime and urbanisation are interconnected are not straightforward. While higher rates of violent crime are generally seen in the larger urban centres, not all urban centres experience similar degrees of violence. That is, security and insecurity in a city are the result of a complex range of socioeconomic, political and demographic factors, which can vary temporally, spatially, as well as be significantly different for different individuals or groups.

Importantly, rapid urbanisation also brings with it a unique set of challenges, which has the potential to overwhelm key government services, including policing and security provision.

There has been much debate about the role of the state in providing security in urban areas, which are becoming increasingly diverse, and where non-state actors also tangibly deliver security.



Credit: Peter Barker, Panos

In our report, **Key Challenges of Security Provision in Rapidly Urbanising Contexts: Evidence from Kathmandu Valley and Terai Regions of Nepal**, we use evidence from Nepal to look at the key challenges for providing security in rapidly urbanising areas. Its findings are based on a review of existing evidence (including, in particular, perceptions surveys amongst youth populations), consultations with key officials and civil society stakeholders, as well as focus group sessions with young offenders, both inside and outside prison.

Overleaf are some snap-shots from our interviews with police officers and young offenders – which all available in their original **Nepali online**.

People are coming to the city looking for work, but they are disconnected from their families and communities



Credit: Subindra Bogati

'The crime in the Kathmandu valley is high (because) ... everyone comes here for a job from all over Nepal... They don't feel comfortable committing crimes in their villages but when they come to the cities like Kathmandu, their perception change.'

Subodh Ghimire, Chief of Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range Office (at time of interview). His jurisdiction covers all of the capital, Kathmandu city.

'None of our family members come to see us. As we are not from Kathmandu, family members do not come to know us being in the jail. I have no one in Kathmandu. I came here in Kathmandu 2 or 3 months ago.'

First time offender

'I am poor man and used to work in the factory. My house is far away from here. There is no one who can come to see me. We knew about the law but we were not sure we would be put into trouble by friends. When I go out from here, I am not going to do the same thing. I won't trust my friends as because of them I got into the jail. I would like to go to my village and work (on) the family land.'

First time offender

Young people are struggling to find jobs...

According to Nepal's National Youth Policy, 38.8 per cent of the total population is between 16-40 years and those aged 15-29 years form 27 per cent of the population, and 17 per cent of the urban population. This makes making youth and adolescent issues of critical national importance. Additionally, the Nepal Labour Force Survey, reports that 400,000 youth enter the labour market each year, and, while approximately 70 per cent of youth are educated, youth unemployment is quite high at around 54 per cent (NLFS 2009). [p32 evidence report]

'Nepal is a poor country. There is no job. Even if I complete my MSc, what I am going to do?? There is no future. It is the situation that compels us for crimes. I am poor and physically disabled and if there is nothing for me in the store, I am certainly going to commit crime.'

First time offender

'Unemployment is the main reason for crimes in the capital.'

First time offender

And they form a significant proportion of perpetrators of crime

Due to the dynamics of migration, urban areas tend to concentrate 'precisely that demographic group most inclined to violence: unattached young males who have left their families behind and have come to the city seeking economic opportunities' (USAID 2005: 7). Such observations are based on research that links jobless and idle urban youth with higher levels of violence, substance abuse, and gang activities (Narayan and Petesch 2010). And yet, we also know that social disorder in urban areas is more closely related to the lack of consistent political institutions and economic shocks, rather than a large urban population, or the predominant presence of particular age groups per se (Buhaug and Urdal 2010).

'Almost all the perpetrators are below 40s but victims are from all age groups. They are normally little educated – either school or college drop outs'

Subodh Ghimire, (at time of interview) Chief of Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range Office. His jurisdiction covers all of the capital

'I have done all the bad things so far from pick-pocketing to using swords to make people wounded. I have been doing this since I was 18 years old. Police started arresting me since I was 22. Police now know me well as a criminal.'

Regular offender, male, 32 years old. Just emerged from prison after a four year sentence for burglary.

'Almost all the offenders are of my age. There are about 160 people in the jail and almost all of them are young.'

First time offender

'Youth involvement in crime should be understood from their societal and educational background. What sorts of culture have been induced by the family and school in them, and what moral / ethics they have learned during their upbringing? Youths are interested in making quick money, by hook or crook. If you look at the young people

who we arrest are mostly poorly educated and do not have skills necessary that make them rich’.

Senior Police Officer, Center for Investigation Bureau

Rapid urbanisation leading to acute urban poverty...

Rapid urbanisation in Nepal has implied that urban poverty is acute and is persisting. Children from the poorest urban quintile are 4.5 times more likely to die before the age of five than children from the wealthiest urban quintile, as well as children from rural areas (DHS 2011). Basic service provision in urban areas is failing to keep abreast with increases in population. Between 1996 and 2006, access to safe drinking water for example, has decreased for the poorest, middle, fourth and wealthiest quintiles of urban residents (DHS 2011). The average monthly income for a household in one of Kathmandu’s 40 informal settlements for example, is NPRs 4,173 (less than one and half a dollar a day). Only four per cent of the slum population earns more than NPRs 10,000 per month (equivalent to US\$100).

‘I have a family and I am the sole earner. When I am in the jail, then there is no one out there to support my family’.

First time offender

One interviewee is 17 years old and works as micro bus conductor. He attempted to steal a scooter after the bus owner refused to give him money to travel to his home.

‘I knew police would arrest me if they find me. There were not that many police mobile checks. I thought they wouldn’t be there. But they were there’.

‘I am doing my masters in science. I was told that I would be given one hundred thousands (Nepal rupees – equivalent of \$1,000) for letting them use my room. As I am physically disabled and have been living in Kathmandu on my own, I thought (it) would be enough to complete my masters. So, I let them use the room but police arrested me as well. The so-called crimes we committed are not deliberately or intentionally done. We have been duped by people we trusted. However, now on, we will be more careful. I will stay away from bad friends. I think getting jobs is a problem’.

First time offender

And the prevalence of drugs

‘Drug addict is one of the major problems in the city areas. However, they are more into stealing and fighting. They look for quick returns’.

Subodh Ghimire, Chief of Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range Office (at time of interview). His jurisdiction covers all of the capital

‘So many young people are addicted to drugs these days. These addicts can do anything, even kill a person, to make money to buy drugs. They don’t have money, so they have to steal money from others. The government should be able to control the drugs and its users. If it is controlled, crime rates will also come down’.

Regular offender

Police feel frustrated with lack of investment and training

The Nepal Police is a key stakeholder and actor in preventing and mitigating the risk of instability in Nepal. However, its agencies are hindered by a lack of adequate transportation, training, and equipment, which often prevents it from effectively completing missions. Urban policing structures are largely in line with regional standards (Das and Palmiotto 2006); however, there is a perceptible need for investment in police infrastructure (including for example, rebuilding police stations destroyed in the conflict), increased resources and support for urban specific training, as well as an updated crime records infrastructure.

‘We have no strategy at the moment. Victims don’t come to the police. So, it is difficult to take initiatives.

Government needs to take some initiatives to make the law victims friendly so that victims could come public. Laws also need to be updated. Nepal government recently have been able to formulate cyber and organised crime law but they are not enough (prepared for) ... (the) new sort of crimes (which) are emerging and criminals are preparing themselves with pretty sophisticated strategy. Sometimes though police works hard, the court leaves the criminals free. This is also frustrating. Nepal police desperately needs a research team. A wing that just focuses in doing research so that we can formulate the policy based on evidence’.

Subodh Ghimire, Chief of Kathmandu Metropolitan Police Range Office (at time of interview). His jurisdiction covers all of the capital

The officer sounded a bit frustrated as he thinks that the “state” organs are being politicised for the interests of a select few. The CIB focuses on money laundering; large criminal operations; human trafficking; IT-related crimes; future crime trends/research

‘(O)ur help is mostly sought after for financial and IT related crimes. We spend ... considerable time in these two sectors, say about 90 percent. Police don’t have enough resources ... for training (or) investigation.

Government has to make it clear whether it wants to use CIB as a lip service or security...they have to develop CIB further. We are trying to expand human resources and have plans to train officers to fight against the crimes

Legal instruments don't have deterrence power, so it, in a way, encourages the crime...Before 1996, state was powerful so law was implemented accordingly. However, after 2006, people have started interpreting the law to suit their interests (as current laws are too vague/contain too many loopholes to be effective). (Therefore) Police ... are not confident enough to (implement) ... the law. That is a problem'.

Senior Police Officer- Center for Investigation Bureau

What do offenders hope to do after they have served their sentence?

'I don't think I will continue opting a profession that helps me make a quick money. I think I have done it enough. Even police have said that if they find me doing such thing again, they will put me in the prison accusing I was arrested with drugs. It means I will have to stay in the prison for another 10 – 15 years. So, I don't want it. I plan to learn skills to be mechanic. Then I plan to have my own motor cycle workshop'.

Regular offender

'I plan to help my parents in the village. I couldn't study but I will support my brother and sister with their education. I don't need any skills to work in the agricultural field'.

First time offender

'I plan to do a Master in Business Studies, or plan to pass public service commission exams and become an officer'.

First time offender

Crime reduction strategies – what should be taken into account?

We find that (1) youth issues, (2) community-based partnerships, (3) urban planning and design, as well as (4) police capacity, resources and training issues, will need to be kept at the forefront of successful crime reduction strategies in urban Nepal.

In particular:

- Being responsive to youth needs entails a multipronged strategy wherein vocational support programmes look to specifically target marginalised urban youth, including those who may have perpetrated violence. Vocational and other support programmes linked to juvenile detention to reach young offenders, particularly those who are at risk of

repeat offending should be a key priority.

- Establishing effective partnerships for community-based interventions entails being inclusive of six constellations of actors: civil society peer groups, the police, prosecution, politicians, the prisons system, as well as the media. We suggest pathways along which these six may interact (e.g. through the '6-P Approach').
- Affirming safety and security as an integral part of the urban development strategy, and creating consultation platforms that bring together urban planners, citizen's groups (in particular those that represent youth and women's voices), as well as the police.
- Strengthening police capacity in terms of personnel numbers, urban specific training and resources, as well as infrastructure. While urban police organisational structures have already been established, and are largely in line with regional standards, we identify a number of entry points for strengthening police capacity including better understanding of urban crime, better data collection and analysis, ex-post policing interventions, and ex-ante crime reduction strategies. Simultaneously, in the context of rapid urbanisation, we also identify a need to undertake regular neighbourhood level participatory multi-stakeholder assessments to get a clearer picture of urban vulnerabilities.

Download the **full report** from the IDS website.

Credits

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