

Communities and the Prevention of Crime and Violence in Douala, Cameroon

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Since 1990, Douala has gained the reputation of being a dangerous city. For example, in only two years from 2009 to 2011, an increase of robberies and the reselling of stolen goods rise to about 156%. In the period from 2008 to 2011, the city of Douala accounted for 60% of the homicides in the coastal region and 86% of assaults implicating bodily harm.

This paper, summarizes the Country related results of a joint research program on violence prevention in Sub Sahara Africa¹ and examines the manifestations of urban violence and prevention strategies by the community in six neighbourhoods with different income levels in Douala. The inadequate capacity of government and the municipality to provide meaningful protection against crime and violence has led the communities to attempt defending their homes and neighbourhoods on their own. In the residential zones visited as part of this study, 35% of households have been victims of robbery, 23% of physical aggression and 16% of burglaries within the previous 2 years.

In this light, the study evaluates the ability of communities to implement local prevention strategies to reduce crime and violence in their immediate urban environment. Specific interest was directed towards Neighbourhood Watch Committees (NWC) as opposed to the conventional efforts made by individual households and families.

Criminality in the city of Douala

Douala is the largest city in Cameroon and the capital of Cameroon's Littoral region.² With its large port it handles most of the country's exports, and is the commercial capital of the country. As of 2010 Douala and its surrounding area had an estimated population of 2,5 million inhabitants³.

According to police statistics violent crime is increasing in Douala.⁴ The inventories of burglaries and robberies shows a jump from 81 and

01. U-Care: Urban Violence in Sub Sahara Africa. It's impacts, Coping Strategies and Peace Building. Technische Universität Darmstadt and Global Urban Institute Berlin (GLOBUS), funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

02. Cameroon is divided in then regions. Douala is the capital of Littoral region and the biggest town of the country.

03. According to the Third General Population and Housing Census in Cameroon

102 points on then crime index from 1998 to a 1999 (Meutchehé Ngomsi, 2009). In the same way as did damage to property (2008-2011) infractions to bodily integrity (rapes, physical aggression). Certainly some zones of the city are more affected than others, what the paper will also illustrate.

One deficit in the public discussion about crime, but also in the literature, is an imprecise differentiation between various expression of crime and violence – which become particularly problematic when it comes towards the design of prevention strategies. For example, domestic violence and rape cannot be compared with gang and drug violence and requires completely different prevention strategies. Therefore this text starts with an attempt to clarify at least the terminology commonly associated with crime and violence.

04. It is difficult to have global data on the criminality in Cameroon and particularly in Douala. Nevertheless the scientific publications (M'packo, 2000; Meutchehé, Sados & Tchoko, 2003; Issa, 2004; Loé, Meutchehé Ngomsi, 2010; Nga Ndongo, 2008), the daily press, the results of the enquiry of victimization realized in Yaounde (2001) and Douala (2003) in the framework of the project "Safer Cities" of the UN-Habitat, indicate that the Cameroon is facing an augmentation of criminality in the urban area from the decade of 1990.

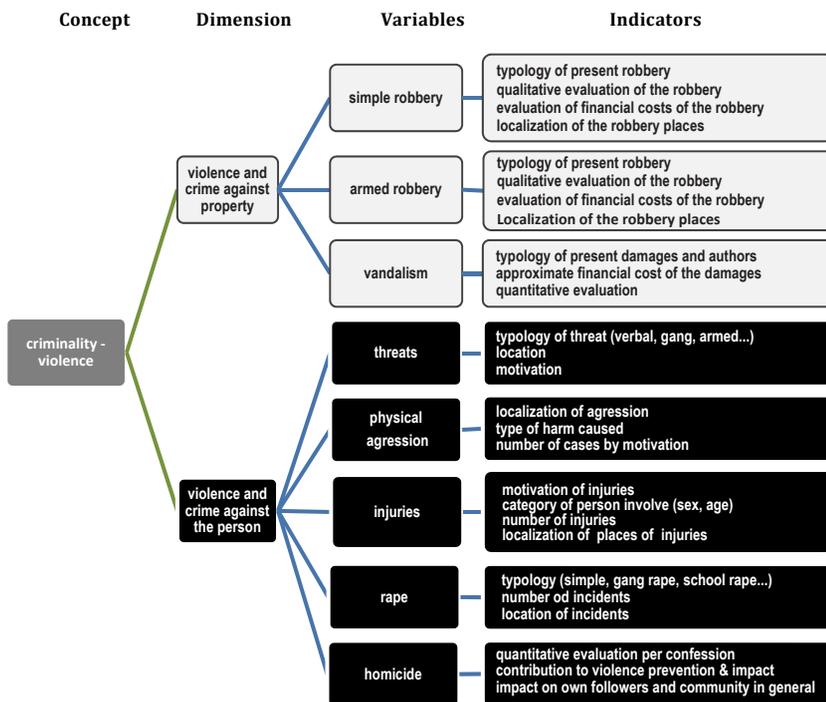


Figure 1: *categorisation of criminality and violent crime.*
Source: author 2011

A first and very simple distinction is achieved according to the object of criminal aggression: if it is directed against goods the adjective 'violent' is rarely used whereas in the case that the object is a person violence is almost always part of it, even if in some cases legislation fails to declare it to be a criminal act (as in the case of state violence).

Crimes against goods are subdivided in three variables (burglary, pick-pocket and destruction of goods). The perpetrators can be local residents or aliens to the neighbourhood. Crimes against persons can be distinguished by five variables (rape, homicide, physical aggressions, threats and injuries)

Another important characteristic is territoriality with a first and simple distinction between indoors (private) and open space (public). In public

05. The open fields space surrounding Mbappé Leppe stadium in the Akwa neighbourhood, the stadium of Camp TSF in New Bell, the stadium of Cité CICAM in Bassa and around the Reunification Stadium, along the fence of the International airport of Douala, the crossroads of the Cité des Palmiers and the Congo Market are place frequented by dealer and users of marijuana.

space markets and crossroads are the main public spaces considered dangerous by the populations. According to the victimization survey of 2003, the Central Market of Douala is the public space felt to be most dangerous in town (more than 28% of the respondents). It is followed by the Ndokoti-Tunnel and crossroads (these two sites were indicated by 13,8% and 13,1% of responses). Some areas have a bad reputation because they are frequented by dealers and users of marijuana.⁵

Case studies on urban violence in different neighbourhoods

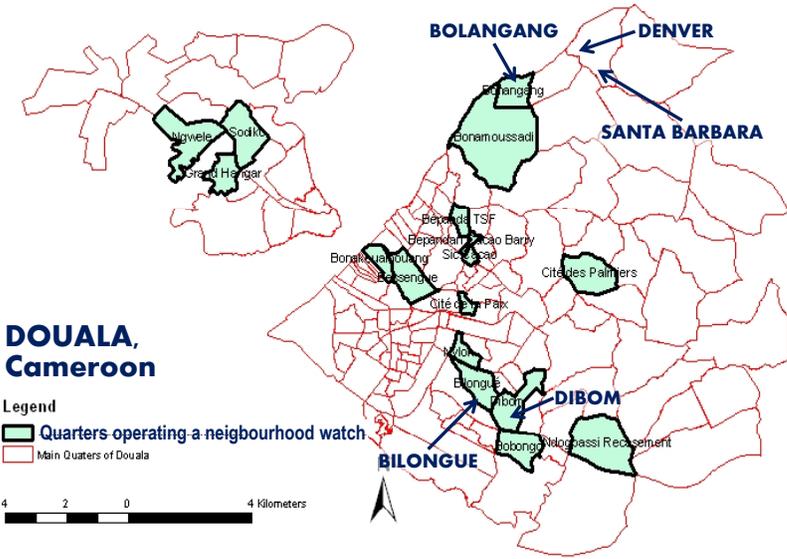


Figure 2: Neighbourhoods of Douala having a vigilante committee and selected neighbourhoods for the field studies

In order to collect information on violence prevention strategies in a large variety of different neighbourhood situation, six neighbourhoods with different economic and social status were selected for the field work: three with poor status (Dibom II, Dibom III and Bilongué II), two middle income areas (Bonangang, Mobil Guinness) and one rich neighbourhood (Denver-Bonamoussadi).

Denver (high income)

Denver is a neighbourhood of high standard developed to accommodate the wealthy individuals. In this neighbourhood, we see are comfortable villas with raised concrete fences. The owners are looking for privacy and more security. The average size of plots varies between 400 and 500m2. The height of the surrounding walls, the size and decoration of houses symbolize ‘architecture of fear’. Population densities are less than in the other study areas. Most houses have decorative gardens, some have swimming pools, video surveillance and watch dogs. Each home is secured by at least one guard. At various entrances and exits of the neighbourhood are checkpoints and controlled by guards every night from 9o’clock. The streets of these neighbourhoods are well designed, sufficiently broad, and paved and distinguished by the cleanliness of their



streets. The garbage collection company HYSACAM regularly collects the wastes. The nature of houses, cleanliness of streets, the presence of guards and abundant lighting indicate high incomes of the residents

*Left:
Entry gates
around the Denver
estate*

Middle income areas Bonangang, Mobil Guinness

*Right:
Inside Denver
estate*

Bonangang is located north of Douala and is close to Denver-Bonamoussadi. Bonangang is divided into two areas: the first is on a plateau and well structured with some comfortable villas and the second is on the valley part and unstructured with slum. The two parts are separated by an escarpment of 100 meters. On the plateau the streets are large but are generally in poor condition due to the passage of trucks which go to carry sand from Wouri River. In the slum area, the houses are built of temporary materials; population density is very high like in Bilongué II and Dibom II. The high density housing and spontaneous vegetation imply low visibility, which restricts surveillance on the slum part of Bonangang and is believed to increase the risk of crime.

As the name suggests, the neighbourhood Mobil Guinness is located between the Mobil petroleum company and the Guinness beer factory. It is located about 500 meters from the crossroad Ndokoti. The houses are modern and luxurious but more modest than in Denver-Bonamoussadi. Many houses have fence, gardens, guards and guard dogs. Houses and population are less dense than the one of Bilongué II, Dibom II and III. A portion of the streets is unpaved and poorly maintained. Public lighting covers almost the whole neighbourhood, but remains insufficient as in Dibom and Bilongué.

Low-income Dibom and Bilongué neighbourhoods

Located south of the town, ten miles from Denver, the Bilongué II and Dibom II and III neighbourhoods are unstructured areas and slums. The houses are built of temporary materials, including boards, low quality wood and roofing sheets. Population density is very high. Along the main (paved) roads across these neighbourhoods, most houses are built in concrete and house commercial activities. The average plot size varies between 200 and 300m². The fences exist at all they are made from scrap material. The streets are not wide enough and include many dead-end-streets. Informal activities narrow the usable roadway of certain streets, which provides a pretext to HYSACAM for not regularly collecting the



*View of
Bonangang estate
Photos:
Christophe Sados*

waste – and what does not help to keep the streets clean... These neighbourhoods attract relatively poor individuals who seek to rent houses that are less expensive than downtown. Despite the donations of some charitable persons in these neighbourhoods, street lighting remains inadequate and a number of streets are unlit. These are said to be popular as hiding places for criminals.

The Dibom III neighbourhood on the other hand is relatively well structured. This is a resettlement zone with plots of 150 to 200m² which had been urbanized by MAETUR-ARAN⁶ to accommodate households evicted from a rezoning project in the Nylon area. The construction of identical houses had been imposed by the MAETUR ARAN Company, and the building materials are conventional. The streets were well equipped initially but became degraded, dirty and blocked in certain places for lack of maintenance. The lighting is very poor. Some sites are still unoccupied land and rumours claim that they serve as hideouts for bandits.

The Dibom III neighbourhood has a market located in the so called “Carrefour des Billes.” The space occupied by the market and adjoining areas are continuously infested with all kinds of waste left behind by the merchants. The trading activities cause the disruption of vehicular and pedestrian movement and the streets around the market are muddy and impassable during the rainy season. The presence of garbage on the streets, in the gutters, bushes along some streets indicate that the maintenance of these areas is poor. Poor housing standards, lack of safe public places, bad road conditions, and inadequate street lighting have indicated that they are poor neighbourhoods.

Crime before the installations of neighbourhood watches

Acts of violence and crime were recorded through a victimization survey (2011) evaluating the situation two years before a neighbourhood watch was set up in their neighbourhoods. The results are shown in Table 1.

According to the results of victimization survey, robberies constitute 35% of offenses and ranks first of the criminal acts of the six neighbourhoods survey. The poor neighbourhoods record the biggest number of robberies (28% to Dibom III and 26% in Dibom II), while the middle income neighbourhood of Mobil Guinness and the rich neighbourhood of Denver-Bonamoussadi have fewer robbery cases (6%). The most stolen objects are the electronic appliances (32,2%), money and jewelry (25,8%), cell

06. L'ARAN means: l'Agence de Restructuration et d'Aménagement de Nylon. This company was created by MAETUR (Society for Planning and Equipment of Urban and Rural Land) to widen a number of streets in Nylon and to complete missing infrastructure.

Left:
An aerial view
of Dibom2 and
Dibom3

Right:
Bilongué. The
shacks are
built from
non-permanent
materials.



District of Investigation	Physical Aggression	Home Burglaries	Robberies	Sexual Aggression or Rape	Insults and injuries	Threats	Total
Dibom III	23	26	32	1	14	14	110
Bilongué II	19	4	22	1	8	11	65
Dibom II	13	8	30	0	2	2	55
Mobil Guinness	8	3	10	0	6	1	28
Bonangang	9	8	18	0	13	12	60
Denver-Bonamoussadi	5	3	4	0	0	0	12
Total	77	52	116	2	43	40	330

phones (16,1%), gas bottles and motorcycles (6,5% each). Jewelry and mobile phones were stolen at homes and in the streets, whereas the electronic items (televisions, DVD, musical chain), gas bottles, motorcycles and dresses are stolen from the residence.

The physical aggressions are the second demonstration of delinquency in the survey neighbourhoods. 23% of respondents had been victims of physical aggression once and 2% at least twice. Among the attacked people, 38,5% have been wounded, 7,7% had some bruises, 7,7% fainted, but 42,2% didn't suffer any bodily harm. 18,2% think that they were victim of a single perpetrator whereas 72,7% say that they were attacked by a group of criminals. When the aggressors act in a group, their tasks are well distributed: some control the places and others attack the victim. In the six neighbourhoods of our survey, the majority of aggressions take place at night (71,4%). The presence of many empty plots, notably in Dibom III and the availability of hiding places in the different neighbourhoods of survey were blamed for the biggest number of the aggressions in the night. Otherwise, some kiosks, left unclosed during the night by their owners are used by the delinquents to the consumption of marijuana and for ambushes.

The poorest neighbourhood, Dibom III experienced the biggest number of physical aggressions (30%), it is followed by Bilongué II with 25%. Dibom II occupied the third position with 17%, and fourth position is Bonangang with 12%. Mobil Guinness and Denver-Bonamoussadi are the neighbourhoods that record little aggressions with respectively 10 and 6%. This linkage between status of the neighbourhood and exposure to crime and violence is also expressed in the victimization rate.

Table 1: Crime face by the population of the neighbourhood before the creation of the neighbourhood watch.
Source : Field Investigation, July 2011

District of Investigation	S=Number of households surveyed	V=Number of victimization	Average number of persons victimized per household (V/S)
Dibom III	60	110	1,8
Dibom II	36	55	1,5
Bilongué II	31	65	2
Mobil Guinness	31	28	1,2
Bonangang	50	60	1,2
Denver-Bonamoussadi	23	12	0,52

Table 3: Level of victimization of household in the survey neighbourhoods.
Source : Field survey, July 2011

Level of victimization of household in the survey neighbourhoods

The level of victimization of the households above shows that the status of the district generally influences its level of safety. It clearly enough appears that the households of the poor neighbourhoods are three to four times more victims than the households of rich neighbourhoods, and the middle income neighbourhoods are two times more victimized than the households of the rich neighbourhoods. The victimization comparison of the households between the middle income neighbourhoods and poor neighbourhoods shows that the latter are 1,5 times more victimized than the middle income neighbourhoods.

Localization of aggression: Among the acts of physical aggression 41,2% of victims were attacked at home, 33,3% to the surroundings area, 11,8% further away in the neighbourhood and 13,8% out of their residential neighbourhood.

Hour of aggression: Only 2% of the perpetrators were less than 15 years of age, 68% were aged between 15 and 30 years and 30% were older. It has been reported that particularly the young perpetrators are becoming more and more violent and that organized crimes seem to be specializing in stealing of vehicles or selling drugs, especially in Bilongué I and Makia.

Burglaries: Also the incidence of burglaries decreases with rising income (who can afford to pay for better protection): Dibom III accounted for 27,5% of burglaries, followed by Dibom II with 25,9%, Bilongué II with 19% and Bonangang with 15,5%. Mobil Guinness and Denver-Bonamoussadi have less burglary with 8% and 3% respectively. The level of burglaries could also be explained by the type of housing prevailing in the survey neighbourhoods. In the poor neighbourhoods of Bilongué II and Dibom II, about one house out of three is constructed with temporary materials. The doors of houses have generally been manufactured with less resistant materials and don't have sophisticated locks. They are easy to break in. On the other hand, in rich Denver-Bonamoussadi or middle-income Mobil Guinness, high walls and strong gates or even guards present a much better protection.

19% of burglaries take place during daytime between 6 a.m and 6 p.m, 20% between 6.p.m and mid night and 61% occur between midnight and 6 a.m. According to Cohen and Felson (1979), "as the women integrate the job market, the number of houses left without surveillance in full day increases. Thus, one observes a rise in the number of burglaries."



Violence prevention strategies

The sex theories have been considered to be most relevant for our research and its collection and analysis of data. There are :

- the theory of social disorganization;
- the theory of defendable space;
- the theory of Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED);
- the theory of rational choice;
- the theory of routine activity ;
- the theory of criminal motivation .

These theories are complement and focus the link between social and physical environment and the criminality or on the manipulation of the physic and environmental characteristics of the underworld. From this theoretical base, the following prevention strategies have been identified (see Figure 4 in the next page).

This diagram categorizes different strategies of prevention'. It details the different dimensions, variables and indicators permitting to determine the meaning given to each concept. Conceptionally there appear two principal dimensions: traditional and situational.

The *traditional type of prevention* is essentially based on the customs or communities member's culture to avoid or at least to restrain the violence by the dissuasive practices and mode of conflicts' prevention can be subdivided in five variables. Every variable presented in the conceptual table is appreciated and evaluated by the verifiable indicators. These five variables can also be split further in three approaches: namely (1) the conventional approach to dissuade against thief and unmask offenders (Cadi⁷); and (2) the strategy to assure the personal protection (fetishism and magical potion) and (3) the strategy to preserve peace between members of the community (tribunal of reconciliation).

The situational type of strategies are subdivided in ten variable (super-vising, physical protection/ gates, access control, alert, road maintenance and various network, collaboration with the FMO, weeding, sanitation, mob justice and sensitization) that represent different popular practices of communitarian or private care of security. These strategies are named "situational" because they link the criminal activities to the

High walls and strong gates in Denver-Bonamoussadi make burglaries less likely
Photos:
Kosta Mathéy

07.
Cadi is a beverage and other occult objects to detect authors of sinful acts. It's a practice from the Bamileke tradition. Bamileke is one of the 250 tribes of Cameroon

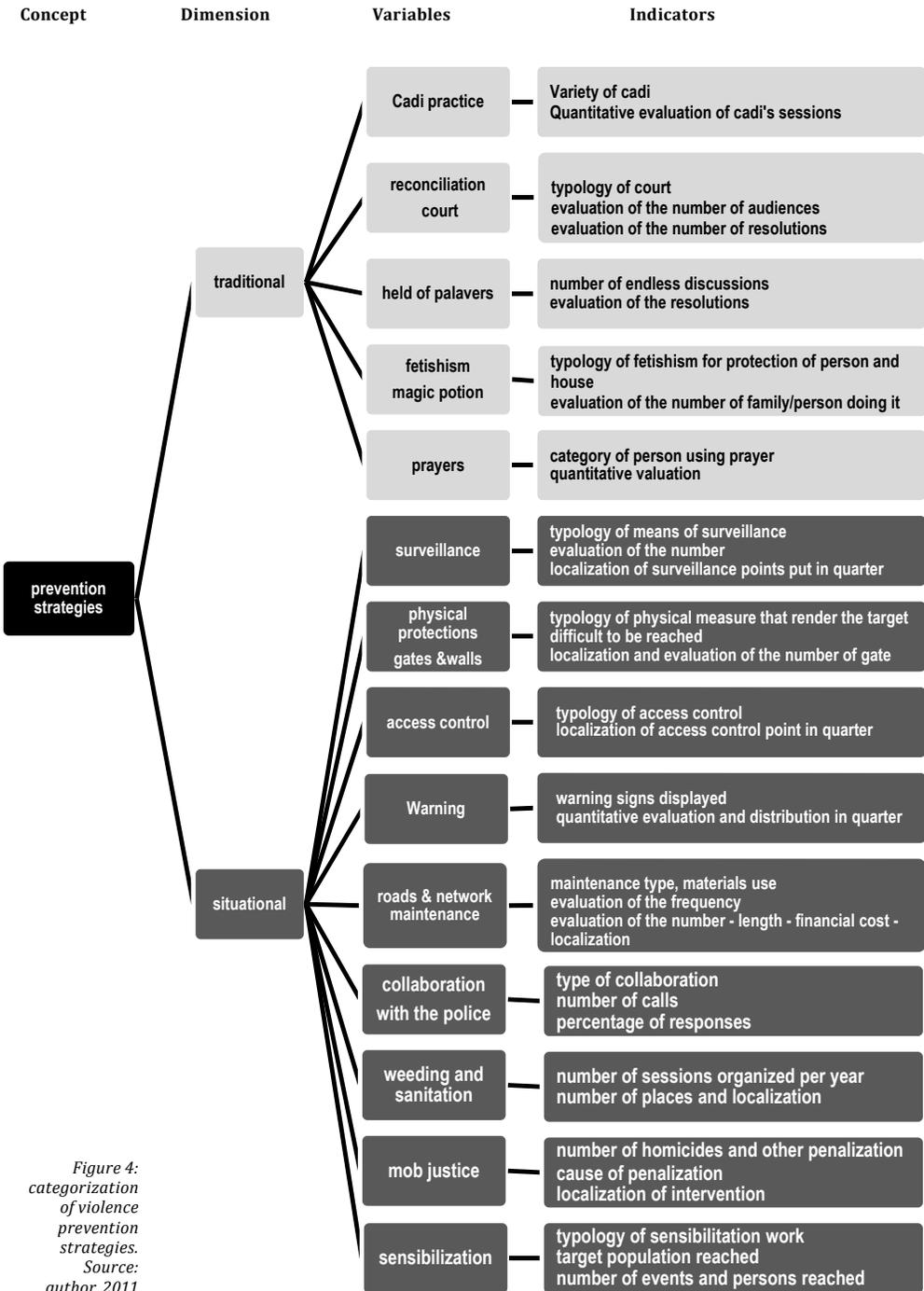


Figure 4: categorization of violence prevention strategies. Source: author, 2011

*Mob justice in
Douala.
Photo:
Sados Touonsi,
2011*



specific features of the physical environment (redevelopment areas) and to targeted precaution (improvement of the visibility, supervision, cleanliness campaign) or a particular reaction (call to policemen, mob justice). The indicators spell out practical examples of such practice.

As mentioned already, prevention measures can be individualistic or collective. In the context of this book we define the collective forms of prevention strategies '*community based*' which is still a rather broad concept and merits some clarification in the case of Cameroon. The diagram on the following page visualizes the case:

The diagram details the different dimensions and variations of community-based prevention, and indicators' helping to identify the meanings within the broader concept. Thus, the community does not only have a social dimension (like a group of persons or a specific social agent, or a cultural habit) but also can refer to physical territory with specific environmental characteristics. Hence the diagram differentiates between two principal dimensions: "social organization" and "physical organization".

The *dimension "social organization"* is subdivided in five variables (family, town's association, town's kingdom, vigilante committees, religious communities) that represent different groups that use to intervene in efforts to reduce levels of crime and violence in Douala's townships. Examples of collective efforts are variable: presence to the meeting, financial contribution to the town activities, implication in the awareness of inhabitants, participation to the work of public interest and the monitoring support of the town.

The *dimension "physical environment"* is also subdivided in five variables (the habitat, road maintenance and cleaning, public lighting, public space, sanitation improvement). These variables principally relate to "ecological" theories of violence prevention which suggest increasing urban safety through modifications in physical component of urban space... Again, the indicators list measurable examples to be identified in the field.

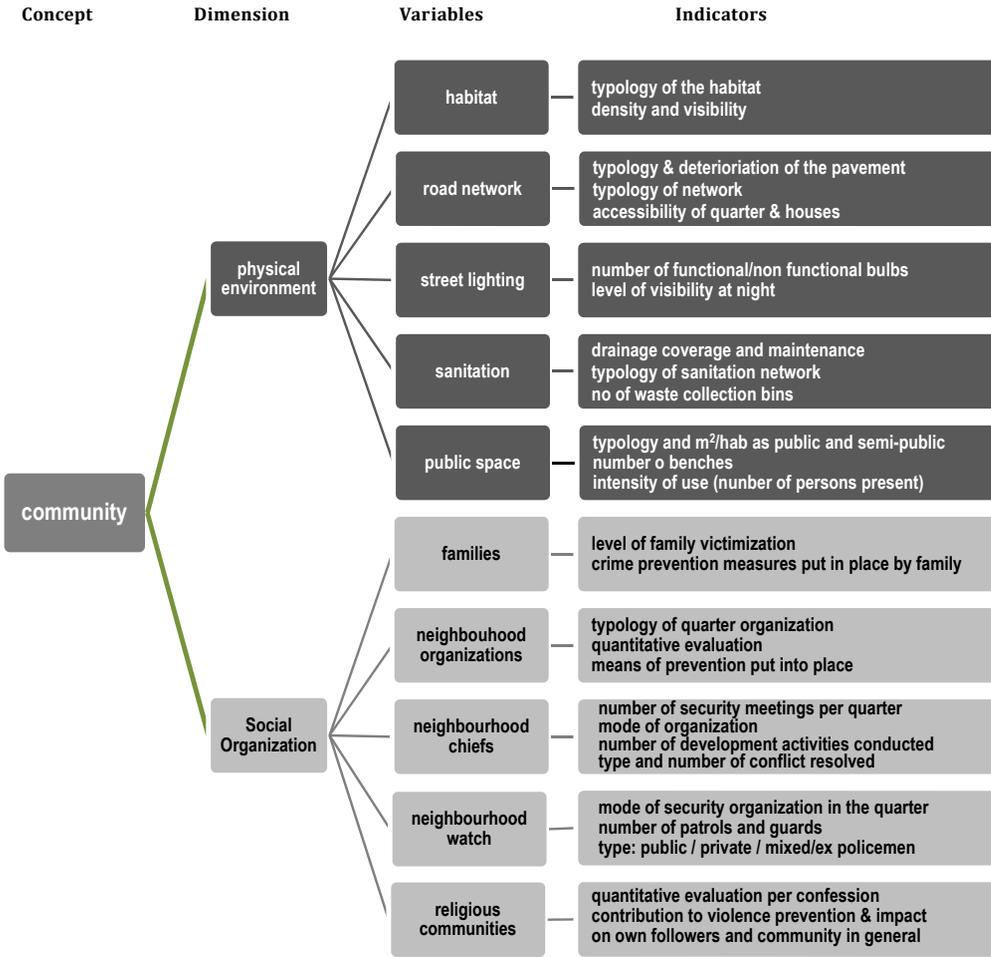


Figure 5: Conceptualization of community-based strategies. Source: author 2011

The practice of collective strategies in Douala

Collective strategies take, in most cases, the form block watches and / or the development committees, but may also be delegated to the commercial sector. Each neighbourhood tends to develop its own operational mode.

The setting up of the block watch

76% of the respondents of our survey affirm that the elevated levels of insecurity that justifies the setting up of the block watch in their neighbourhood. However, the strategies to put these committees in place are not uniform in Dibom III and Dibom II. The chiefs of the Dibom neighbourhoods confided the recruitment of the watchmen to the private security company “Africa Security”. This agent, with the help of some chiefs of blocks, chooses 21 watchmen and trains them in the techniques of self-protection. In Bonangang, the *neighbourhood security chief* chooses the watchmen among the adolescents of the neighbourhood which must have a good moral standing and “physical aptitude”. In Denver-Bonamoussadi,



the parents do not accept that their children become watchmen and confide this task to members of the Toupouri tribe originating from the Far Northern Region of Cameroon.⁸ The recruitment of these watchmen must be endorsed by a certificate of hood conduct issued by the state police. Then a list of retained candidates is deposited with the sub-divisional office of the locality, and from there it is passed on to the chief of the neighbourhood concerned. In the middle income neighbourhoods of Bilongué II and Mobil Guinness the local youth organizes the community watch on their own, with the approval of the security chief of the neighbourhood.

The functioning of the community watches

Several strategies have been developed on the field by the watchmen: the control, the sensitization, the collaboration with the police and gendarmerie.

The controlling strategies of the neighbourhoods by the vigils.

Most frequently, community watches start operating every night at 8 p.m or 9.p.m. They check all people that enter or leave the neighbourhood, especially the cars that do not belong to residents of the neighbourhood. Other watchmen move on foot, on motorcycle (case of Dibom III) or by car (case of Denver) all over the place while others just concentrate on the known hot spots. In addition, the mobile telephone numbers of the chief of vigil or the security chief of neighbourhood are distributed to be distributed to all heads of household. Bonangang, has organized a “*rapid intervention team*” composed of four watchmen which can be reached around the clock. Hence the neighbours feel safer once they know that they call for help even in the middle of the night. They can issue a general alarm because most houses keep a whistle for that purpose.

In the rich neighbourhood of Denver-Bonamoussadi or the middle income neighbourhoods of Mobil Guinness and Bonangang, a “*road closure*” or “*security gate*” with an iron bar is installed in every street which enters the neighbourhood whereas in the poor neighbourhoods of Bilongué II and Dibom II and III, the watchmen tie ropes across the roads very night between 8 and 9 o'clock., but the rope cannot block or stop a driver or a motorcyclist who intends to break it. In Bonangang, the watchmen register the names of all those that enter or leave the neighbourhood

A community meeting in the house of Dibom III neighbourhood chief in Douala.

Photo:
Kosta Mathéy

Community meeting organized by the community chief.

Photo:
Kosta Mathéy

08.

In Denver, the chief of neighbourhood signed a contract with the company ERG in 2008 to guide and help the vigils of the neighbourhood. Every night, this company comes to make a patrol by car in the neighbourhood



Warning displayed by the neighbourhood chief to distract possible invaders. Photo: Sados Touonsi 2010.

after midnight in a book. In addition to the control, the vigils collaborate with the police and gendarmerie to different extent.

Another element of the strategy that one meets in the neighbourhoods of Douala is the collaboration with the police and gendarmerie. One can distinguish several types of collaboration:

The first aid: in cases when the watchmen are attacked by “heavy banditry”, they can call the police and ask for help. They can also solicit the police who happen to live in the neighbourhood. They are also supposed to alarm the police when the population wants to commit mob justice. This was the case in January 2010 when a bandit, trapped after having stolen a bag of bread, was beaten up by community members but finally saved through the intervention of the gendarmerie of Nylon (after a call by the chief of Dibom II). In general, when a thief is arrested by the watchmen, he is handed over to the police or gendarmerie. Also stolen goods are being delivered and recollected to and from the police stations.

Action by traditional institutions of the community

Two strategies of prevention notably the communication and the realization of amenities of safety are present in the neighbourhood.

In the poor neighbourhoods, the neighbourhood chief of the community security chief display warning to potential criminal by means of a sign-board or banderole displayed at the entry of the neighbourhood. They may also call all parents at the beginning of the neighbourhood watch to inform on the consequences if their children are arrested for crime, since very often the perpetrators are children of the neighbourhood.

The physical amenities aiming to warn criminality

Place based prevention strategies by groups of neighbours may consist in improving street lighting, for example by fixing lamps on the facade of each house – especially close to known hot spots or improving visibility by collectively removing weeds on public ground.

In 2009, a number of 58 streets lamps were being installed in Bonangang by the “Development Committee and Security of the Neighbourhood”. In the five other neighbourhoods, an average of 60 street lamps are installed or replaced each year by the leaders of the neighbourhood with money collected from all households. Very regularly, the vacant plots are reclaimed and gutters cleaned. The kiosks that clutter the streets and serve as hiding places to the delinquents are removed if they are not regularly closed by their owner.

In Bilongué II, Dibom II and III, Bonangang, community work sessions are organized regularly upon the call or the person responsible for hygiene and public healthiness of the neighbourhood and the support of the chief of the neighbourhood and the development committee. The entire

Men and women of the neighbourhood meet on a weekend to clean up public space in Dibom III.

Photo:

Sados Touonsi



population, men, young and women are expected to participate in these works which are generally held on a Sunday morning. Absentee neighbours donate some money to pay for food and drinks of the rest. Typical tasks include weeding the drains as well as some abandoned lands, or the gutters are scoured. On other occasions the main streets are repaired through the neighbourhood development committee with funds contributed by the inhabitants. For example, a much circulated road 1.5 km of roads was repaired connecting Dibom III with Bilongué II from 'Entrée Billes' to 'Dibom III Market' in 2009.⁹

The prevention of the robberies by market shop owners

Shop owners of the Market of Dibom III organized themselves to improve the security of their shops while recruiting three night guards. From 6.p.m, these guards take service. They are equipped with spears, bows, whistles and knives. They patrol the shops together. Each shop owner pays between 1000 F and 2000 F (1,5 to 2 Euros) for the security per month depending on the size of the shop and the value of the goods. The guards collect money together and share among themselves. In case of attack of a guard, he alerts his colleagues by a whistle and the aggressor generally runs away or is arrested. The surveillance seems to be efficient in the sense that traders rarely report a burglary.

Individual preventive measures of criminality

In addition to the collective measures, every household head develops additional strategies to secure his or her home. The figure below shows that the main practice of prevention is securing the doors and windows with locks (50%). This technique is a most used by all households in the different neighbourhood of the study. However, in the rich neighbourhood of Denver-Bonamoussadi, this measure is doubled up with an interphone device, the electronic alarms, bolting systems and similar devices. Some families go back home early (19%) to secure their houses and to reduce the risks of burglary. The use of watch dogs (8%) to dissuade the delinquents comes in third position. This measure is especially observed in the Denver-Bonamoussadi neighbourhood where many households have trained dogs and gardens to keep them. Increasing the height of

09.

According to the chief of this neighbourhood, funds collected amounting to 700 000FCFA (1032 Euros) which permitted to rent a tractor, to pay fuel and the technician who did the work.

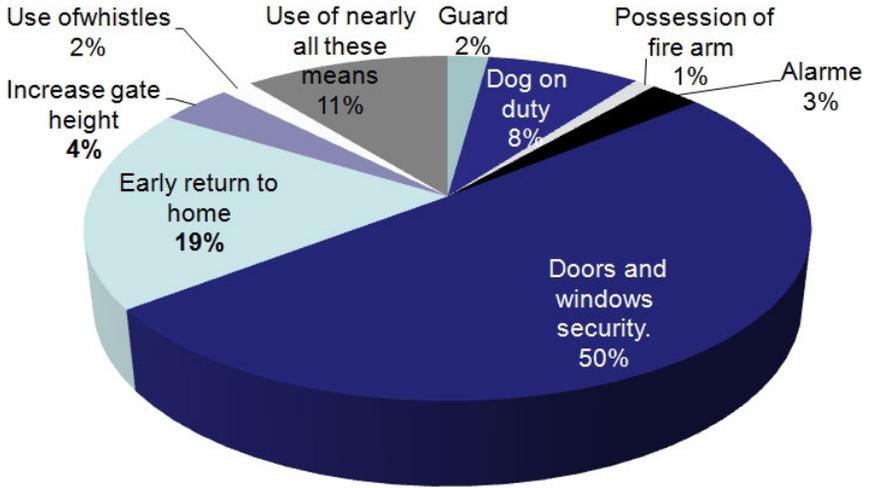


Figure 6: Preventive measures against the burglary of home by the households in Douala in July 2011. Source: field investigation, July 2011

existing gates and walls to stop invaders from climbing them comes in fourth position (4%) followed by alarm padlocks, guards and whistles (3%, 2% and 2%). Some households possess some fire arms (especially members of police or the army, the political elite or a business man).

Preventions against the physical aggressions.

Fear is always present in the life in Cameroon, and precautions are generally taken to reduce the risk of being attacked. The respondents of the survey use four main principal measures to avoid the physical aggressions. Thus, 34,9% choose to go back early at home; 21,7% avoid dangerous corners; 16,5% avoid to go out at night and 8,5% use vigilance to protect against the aggressions. However 18,4% don't undertake anything to avoid the aggressions but hand themselves to God's protection.

In the six surveyed neighbourhoods, the most common strategy against being attacked is to avoid a possible encounter. According to Skogan and Maxfield (1981), avoidance implies that a person moves away physically from a hazardous situation in order to reduce his risk of victimization. Thus, the inhabitants when they can, avoid all places having bad reputation. It is notably about the dangerous places (hot spots), and the places having physical features capable to facilitate the commission of crime as the non illuminated streets and the vacant or less frequented locations. 10 A number of respondents of our investigation say that they keep a good distance from unknown persons in the street, notably during the night. Other people, notably in Denver-Bonamoussadi and in Mobil Guinness don't use the public transportation, avoid frequent shopping, or don't walk alone in the street.

Community watches

All block watches of Douala are financed by the voluntary contributions of the habitants of the neighbourhood. In the six neighbourhoods surveyed,

36% of households paid a contribution for the development committees and/or security of the neighbourhood in January 2010. Dibom III recorded the highest contribution rate with 49% of households, followed by Bilongué II with 44%. In Dibom II, one household out of three paid its contribution whereas in Bonangang it is only one household on four. On the whole, two households out of three don't pay their contribution for collective security prevention of the neighbourhood. The amount of the contribution varies between 500F CFA for the tenants and 1000F CFA¹⁰ for the owners in Dibom II, Dibom III, Bilongué II and Bonangang. In the medium and rich neighbourhoods of Mobil Guinness and Denver-Bonamoussadi, the contribution varies between 2000F CFA and 5000F CFA (3 to 7 Euro) by household depending on whether one is tenant or owner. These contributions are collected by the chiefs of block in Dibom II and III at the end of the month. In Bilongué II, Mobil Guinness and Bonangang, the watchmen pass from one house to collect the contribution. In Denver the security chief is managing the accounts.

In Dibom II and III, notebooks have been printed per block and signed by the chief of the neighbourhood and head of the block. The chief of block receives the contribution of the household against a receipt. Subsequently, the chiefs of blocks inform the residents on the use of previously collected funds and remind them on the necessity to sustain the block watch. In Mobil Guinness and Bilongué II, the guards address to the chief of the quarter every month a correspondence on the financial balance and security activity of the neighbourhood.

In general, the recovery of contributions is difficult because of its voluntary character. Some inhabitants don't react even after reminders of payment, what may motivate the collector to give up on them in the end. Others attack the collectors verbally. At times, unconventional means must be applied to motivate the residents to pay their dues for the watchmen – like not letting pass the cars at the checkpoint of those who refuse paying their dues (in Denver). Because of little valuation of the service the salary of the watchmen are low and irregular, adding up to some 25 000 FCFA to 35000 FCFA (38 to 53 Euros) per month.

With that level of salary, the guards do not have any uniform or other clothing (shoes, dresses) suitable to perform their work properly. In the raining seasons, they feel more difficulties to go round the neighbourhood because they lack coats and waterproof shoes.¹¹ The equipment of watchmen tend to be limited to whistles and sticks to defend themselves in case of necessity, the ropes to bar the access roads at night and a cell phones to inform the authorities or the police in case. Since the equipment is rudimentary the watchmen are not a real hindrance to stop professional bandits. Their only realistic use is to alert a big number of residents and this still serves to dissuade many bandits to operate in the neighbourhood guarded by the watchmen.

The impact of community watches on security.

In all neighbourhoods where the block watch operates, robberies, burglaries and physical aggressions decreased considerably: according to 99% of the respondents in the six neighbourhoods of study, criminality rates

10.
1000 CFA equals
about 1.5 €

11.
Only the watchmen of Bonangang are equipped with safety shoes.

decreased with the setting up of the block watch whereas 1% maintains that there was no change. Disaggregated figures are less overwhelming but still impressive:

- 45,6% of the interviewed said that the robberies and the aggressions decreased;
- 23,8% confirmed a drop in the amount of aggressions and robberies
- 20,7% reported that it is now safe in the neighbourhood to go out at night
- 9% feel that there are no more emergency screams at night

The following declarations, gathered at the time of interviews by the populations support this reduction of criminality:

“Before, every time that a feast was organized in the neighbourhood, the vandals always came to spoil. It’s not anymore the case” declared an inhabitant of Bilongué II.

“Before, we were attacked both day and night. We find some dead bodies as we wake up, people were mutilated with machetes. This is not currently the case since the month of June 2009; we do not hear any emergency screams anymore here and there” declares the chief of block of Dibom III

“Our neighbourhood is more secured now. There are some thefts, stealing of fowls here and there. These are the isolated facts that sometimes come from inside family members. Before then it was armed robberies, local weapons “ (The secretary of Dibom II)

The return of the security also resulted in the overnight movements in these neighbourhoods by the inhabitants and the late closing of the trade places, the presence of children playing in the streets, but also a drop of the mob justice that consisted in putting to death all bandits or presumed bandits arrested in these neighbourhoods.

“With the sensitization of population and the decrease of insecurity, the population accepts that the bandits are delivered to the police and gendarmerie”, explained to us by the chief of the vigils of Dibom II.

However, all these improvements on the security of the neighbourhoods can be attributed to the block watches, but, it is also the fruit of other initiatives by associations based in the neighbourhood (youth associations, women associations, ethnics associations); the impact of the activities of the hygiene committee and healthiness; of development promotion of the neighbourhood led by the development committee and the authorities of the neighbourhood (notably the improvement of the streetlights and the street maintenance); the collaboration of the neighbourhood with the police and gendarmerie; and the construction of a communal mind by the regular organization of the meetings between the residents of the neighbourhood.

Conclusion

The level of victimization of the households carries a direct correlation with the status and income levels of the respective neighbourhood. The figures clearly show that the poor households become victims of crime and violence three to four times more than the households of the rich quarters, and the middle income quarters are two times more victimized than the households of the rich quarters. The victimization comparison of the household's middle income and the poor one show that the latter are 1,5 times more victimized than the middle income quarters

In both rich and poor neighbourhoods of Douala, security is more and more provided by non-state actors, notably private guards and neighbourhood watches. Although the exposure to crime and violence is not comparable in rich and poor quarters, the results of community watches and associated measures at improved the felt security in all investigated settings to a similar extend. Nevertheless, rich neighbourhoods distinguish themselves from poorer neighbourhoods through efficient road closures whereby awareness building strategies seem to be more efficient in loser income communities. The guards of poor quarters are generally dwellers of their respective neighbourhood; meanwhile those of the rich quarters come from elsewhere. These guards work especially at night and pretend to keep watch over public spaces, control different entrances to the quarters, come to the help to the population when alarmed and collaborate with the police and the gendarmerie. But their efficiency is hampered by miserable pay and equipment. They are not in the position to stop well prepared bandits. Their main strength is the ability to drop an alarm when needed which seems to be efficient. Everywhere these committees have been founded, a considerable drop in violence and fear of crime has been reported by the residents.

The intervention of the civil actors in securing the lives in their vicinity became a dominant feature in the neighbourhoods of Douala. On the whole, the strategies of the communities in the neighbourhoods are worth of interest because they present original approaches that have been adapted to the local realities.

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