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COMMUNITIES AND CRIME WARS

Adaptation and resilience

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Introduction

Smuggling, as many of the chapters in this volume have underscored, is not inherently perceived or experienced to be a deviant phenomenon for communities living in zones where contraband is rife. Rather, as Titeca and Quitariano underscore in their chapters in this volume, it can be an essential means of livelihood generation and coping in situations in which economic opportunities are sparse and state support limited or non-existent.

However, even while acknowledging the broad stabilizing effect smuggling and the contraband trade can have, it is clear that smuggling can, and in a growing number of instances, has transformed into something destabilizing and threatening to communities located on its periphery. Frequently, such a shift coincides with the emergence of structured organized crime groups seeking to dominate or monopolize an emergent trade in high-value contraband (Herbert, 2019).

The last 30 years have manifest a rising challenge by transnational organized crime, both globally and specifically along key smuggling and trafficking routes, posing a growing challenge to local communities, states, and regions (Walker, Kemp, Shaw, and Reitano, 2021). Institutions have become compromised, inequalities become more evident, and violence has risen, while at the same time becoming increasingly difficult to resolve.

Under these circumstances, the line between crime and the state has become blurred. In a rising number of instances, organized crime groups have functionally supplanted authorities, both in rural and borderland smuggling zones and urban areas where contraband markets are concentrated, establishing zones where criminal governance is a de facto reality for large swaths of population.

Though still an exception to the norm, situations in which smuggling, or areas astride contraband routes, come to be dominated by organized crime groups are important to focus upon for several reasons. First, they are substantially destructive to often vulnerable populations, menacing them with violence, coercion and exploitation, with risks especially concentrated upon women, girls and youth. (Gastelum Felix, 2017; Thomas and Pascoe, 2018; Burger, 2019). Communities face the preoccupation of lives consumed by violence, or fear that their youth will be recruited, voluntarily or not, by criminal actors (Burger, 2019). Further, efforts by organized crime groups to control smuggling routes can lead to the targeting, taxation or

exclusion of forms of smuggling which do support local livelihoods, further menacing the livelihoods of often vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Further, the emergence of organized crime in a contraband zone can be highly visible, sometimes by design, when covered by local and international media (Lantz, 2016). This visibility, and the political pressure it can induce, can in turn skew the policy responses of governments on public safety issues more broadly, impacting both organized criminal actors and smugglers more broadly, with the latter category often far less able to weather securitized government efforts than the former.

The challenge in countering transnational organized crime is often perceived to be a binary struggle between states and criminal organizations. Responses and lessons learned often emanate from this, heavily focused on what states should do or what aid can be extended to make state capacities more effective. These responses broadly fail to acknowledge that state actors can also play a significant role in criminal predation, or that with the communities most affected, longstanding failures in service delivery mean that state institutions have little legitimacy (Reitano and Hunter, 2016). Rarely are the local communities that face the challenge posed by organized crime analyzed and recognized as actors with agency, resources, and capacities, who often hold innovative and inspiring lessons on how to surmount criminal conflicts, promote better local governance and identify opportunities to shift beneficial forms of smuggling from criminalized to licit economic opportunities.

While often vulnerable, community members are neither static nor powerless actors. Their members can be criminal participants, victims, and advocates for accountability – sometimes all within the same family. In numerous cases, communities have sought to respond to the challenge posed to their families and societies by organized crime and alter the status quo, taking robust, yet non-violent approaches to build resilience within their communities (Olson, Shirk, and Wood, 2014).

Community resilience as a practice is not new. Rural and indigenous communities have long self-organized to protect their people and sustain their livelihoods against acute challenges, including environmental degradation, natural disasters and structural violence. Community resilience remains, however, imprecisely understood and ephemeral, to the detriment of at-risk communities and the international community seeking to help them through programmatic intervention. Community resilience against transnational organized crime as a concept is even more nascent, with limited attention given to the approach by governments and civil society actors. The intersections among insecurity, insufficient or threatened livelihoods, violence and the breakdown of the rule of law touch on all themes where civil society action has become more prominent and important.

This chapter focuses on building understanding of community resilience as a concept and in practice as a means of addressing the negative impacts on communities in contexts where smuggling economies have become penetrated or dominated by organised crime groups.¹ The chapter begins by offering a definition of community resilience, including the identification of the actors involved, and offers illustrative examples of resilience approaches. Next, it offers illustrative examples of resilience-building approaches. Third, the challenge posed to resilience efforts, by both criminal and government actions, is detailed. Fourth, it analyzes the counter-intuitive resilience offered by smuggling and illicit economies, and the risks posed to such stability by securitized approaches to organized crime. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief set of reflections on resilience, and avenues forward for research and activism.

The analysis in this chapter is derived from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's work on the issue. Beginning in 2015, the organization began to document community responses to organized crime, largely as a means to present those voices into

international development discussions. This chapter is based on that work, as well as further programmatic work done by the Global Initiative with resilience actors between 2017 and 2021.²

The concept of resilience to transnational organized crime

While the practices involved in resilience are ancient, the concept of resilience as a development tool is relatively new, emerging from the Disaster Risk Reduction field and coming into wider usage only since the 1990s (United Nations, 1994; Kimber, 2019). Over the last three decades, resilience has, however, been widely adopted in a variety of different fields, such as development, peacebuilding and counter-crime, and by different actors, including various United Nations agencies, donors (including the United States and the United Kingdom), and various international NGOs (Norris et al., 2008; Van Metre and Calder, 2016; Barbieri, Fessler, Hermes, and Lehne, 2019; DFID 2011; Seelke and Finklea, 2016).

The concept of resilience as applied to organized crime is newer, and in many ways still evolving. Conceptual work on the issue largely started to crystalize in the late 2000s and early 2010s (see, for example, Felbab-Brown, 2011; Davis, 2012), accompanying an increasing focus by international donors on efforts to support directly efforts to buttress communities against criminal violence and threats, including in the 2011 bilateral U.S.–Mexico “Beyond Merida” strategy, which encompassed an explicit focus on resilience (Seelke, 2021). Since that point, donor interest in the subject has grown, along with efforts to clarify and expand the field, including by authors such as Olson, Shirk and Wood, Carpenter and Cooper, Gastelum Felix, Thomas and Pascoe, Maringira and Gibson, Gutierrez, and Bird (Olson, Shirk and Wood, 2014; Carpenter and Cooper, 2015; Gastelum Felix, 2017; Thomas and Pascoe, 2018; Maringira and Gibson, 2019; Gutierrez, 2020; Bird, 2021).

Despite a rising interest in resilience by academics and practitioners focused on organized crime, the broader concept of resilience remains relatively elastic and loosely defined (Imperiale and Vanclay, 2020). Gastelum Felix has defined resilience as “the capacity of any system...to respond to and recover from shocks and stressors that threaten and/or disrupt its structure and functional capacities” (Gastelum Felix, 2017). Shocks are “sudden events that impact on the vulnerability of the system and its components,” while stressors are “long-term trends that undermine the potential of a given system or process and increase the vulnerability of actors within it” (DFID, 2011).

Resilience capacity is inherently a multilevel concept, identifiable at the individual, familial, community, and national levels, with the capacity of each of those levels reenforcing – or weakening – that of the others (Barbieri, Fessler, Hermes, and Lehne, 2019). Crucially, each of the levels, and actors within each level, do not need to respond in the same way to shocks and stressors. Rather, the emergence of different responses – as long they are diffused and shared and not mutually incompatible – is broadly beneficial, increasing the chances that shocks and stressors will be surmounted or recovered from (Van Metre and Calder, 2016). Resilience capacity also necessarily operates along a dynamic continuum rather than being an end state: the same community can increase or decrease resilience capacity depending on the confluence of endogenous and exogenous factors, such as the shocks and stressors, the actors involved, and the broader political, social or security context.

It is important to note that a number of different actors, operating at different levels, can play a role within resilience building efforts and contribute to countering the negative impacts of transnational organized crime. This can include governments, especially those at the local level. However, situations in which the worst impacts of organized crime are manifest and where

resilience needs are most acute exist due to failed institutional responses, often where the state is weak, complicit, or non-existent. For this reason, it is import to focus on resilience at the community level, undertaken through actors such as community members and other non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, religious forums, and local media organizations.

Gender is a key component of multi-actor analysis around resilience. In part, such a focus is essential as while both men and women are involved in organized crime, the vulnerability and impact of involvement can differ by sex, and forms of vulnerability within communities can be similarly stratified by gender (Shaw and Skywalker, 2017; Ghanem, 2020; Bird, 2021). Therefore, the design of approaches to resilience – especially those meant to engage directly with participants – necessarily need to be tailored with an eye towards gender dynamics in order to achieve success. In approaching resilience building, it is essential to recognize that women often play vitally important roles. They are able, for example, to leverage traditional gender roles to interrupt effectively cycles of violence via negotiation and the creation of safe space. However, they often have only limited representation in or access to the shaping of formal responses to organized crime (Bird, 2021). The inclusion of a gender lens is acutely important for programs and activities which seek to ‘build back better,’ in order to ensure that the programs and initiatives address, rather than entrench, gender based structural inequality and representation (Bird, 2021).

When applied to organized crime issues, the abstractions in the above definitions become clearer. Gastelum Felix and Tennant argue that “when applying resilience building to situations affected by organized crime, communities need to respond to not only long-standing negative situations (stressors such as embedded corruption, culture of extortion or protection etc.), but also immediate negative impacts (shocks such as an assassination or a sudden campaign of violence and/or intimidation)” (Gastelum Felix and Tennant, forthcoming). Further, as responses to the negative impacts of organized crime similarly are inherently multilevel, and multi-approach, actors within the same community, stratified by gender or social markers, for example, can adopt different approaches to transgressive violence or predation, even as national level authorities adapt tools at their disposal to do the same. Finally, on the issue of continuum, a community or family may hold well developed strategies for addressing impacts of stressors linked to some forms of the illicit economy, such as handling extortion or predation, but may be ill-prepared to respond if the context of the local illicit economy shifts, such as if a violent drug trafficking organization begins to operate in the area in which they live (Herbert, 2019).

It is important to distinguish the concept of resilience from that of resistance or contestation. In instances in which organized crime has emerged as a destabilizing threat, some communities have sought to counter it via the formation of community self-defence groups or militias (International Crisis Group, 2013; Lagrange and Vircoulon, 2021). This, however, differs substantially in aim and act from resilience, which according to Thomas and Pascoe, involves non-violent approaches to shocks and stressors (Thomas and Pascoe, 2018). Such a differentiation is key both in approach and impact, with numerous cases underscoring that the move towards the development of armed groups often can be a gateway to further shocks and criminality, with little positive impact on long term stressors (International Crisis Group, 2013).

Emanating from this, approaches to community resilience building to counter organized crime should be conceptualized as “a transformative process of strengthening the capacity of people and communities to effectively respond to and recover from the shocks and stressors of pervasive criminal governance” (Barbieri, Fessler, Hermes, and Lehne, 2019). In practice, resilience building aims to build structures to enable communities to weather adverse events or to recover to a status quo ex-ante after the emergence of an acute challenge. When possible, however, the aim is to fuse the two aspects, endeavor to assist communities in ‘building back

better' by identifying and supporting novel solutions and resilience activities to ensure that if similar challenges reoccur in the future, communities are better placed to lessen or dodge the damage (Gastelum Felix and Tennant, forthcoming).

Forms of resilience building

Forms of resilience, and the resulting nature of resilience-building activities, are situation specific. There is no 'one size fits all' approach. Rather, they differ based on a variety of factors, including the nature of the organized crime challenge, the interplay of stressors and shocks, a community's internal dynamics and existent coping strategies, the nature of broader engagement and capacity of the state, and the structure and nature of local illicit economies (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021).

For this reason, resilience building is a bottom-up exercise, rooted in engaging with and supporting local actors, and often highly dependent on their social capital, the "links, shared values and understandings that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together" (Gastelum Felix, 2017). Such actors understand both the structure and impact (positive and negative) of local illicit economies and the formal and informal networks and social capital which exist within local communities (Gastelum Felix, 2017, Thomas and Pascoe, 2018).

As noted, the specific forms of resilience building are necessarily locally grounded. However, at a broad level, resilience activities can include activities designed to address directly issues of violence, improve community cohesion, offer individual or group support to victims or at-risk populations (including current or former criminal actors), buttress information sharing and awareness raising on resilience and crime issues, and strengthen connections and capacities within communities.

Below are some particularly important approaches which the authors have documented amongst organizations operating throughout the globe. The approaches are not exhaustive; rather, they are illustrative examples which underscore both the dynamism and the contextually tailored approaches undertaken by communities, civil society organizations and other non-state actors in confronting the challenges posed by organized crime.

The first, and most immediately important for communities menaced by organized crime related killings or disappearances, is violence interruption. Gang mediation by community members, aimed not at eliminating organized crime, but at addressing the acute negative impact it poses, has emerged in recent decades as a particularly important strategic approach (Sharkey, Torrats-Espinosa and Takyar, 2017). Outside of Cape Town, South Africa, the *Manenberg Safety Forum* has been deeply involved in such mediation. As Roegchanda Pascoe, chairperson of the Safety Forum, noted, "Whether we like it or not, we must live with them [gangs], so it is important for us to engage with them because we have to share the space with them. It was through this realization that our work in gang mediation started" (Thomas and Pascoe, 2018).

The second is the creation of 'safe spaces,' such as youth centres. Such safe spaces are not just meant to be physically safe from violence, but also to offer a space removed from criminal stresses and pressures, diverting those who might otherwise be targeted by organized crime actors. This can help to break the cycle of organized crime recruitment and offer pathways away from crime for those already enmeshed within illicit economies (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021). In Cali, Colombia, the organization *Vicaria para la Reconciliación y La Paz* builds safe spaces for youth, especially those who previously were involved in gang activity. Yesid Perlaza, from the organization, noted the importance of providing an avenue of escape for such youth.

Youths see that someone has been able to escape from their condition of violence, of drug dependency, or the condition that allowed them to be out of legality. To become part of legality is important because it gives them hope. They have lost hope, they have lost faith, what we want is for them to recover hope and faith in institutionalism and to aspire to that offer which is limited but is always present. It's bringing institutions to the territories, taking away that space from criminal networks, and preventing them from having offers for their criminal activities.³

The work of *Vicaria para la Reconciliación y La Paz* took on added importance during the COVID-19 pandemic, when youth involved in the organization's programmes were mobilized to help the community, via the delivery of food and sanitary information. Such an activity was both an example of efforts by the community to stabilize itself in response to the immediate threat posed by the disease, and a manifestation of longer-term efforts to 'build back better', with the youth previously involved in organized crime, and stigmatized for it, using their involvement to change the way the community perceived of them.

Another example, in Tanzania, is the development of safe spaces for drug users. There the Salvage CSO provides support and shelter to drug users, focusing in particular on women. The aim is to offer opportunities for harm reduction, access to psycho-social services and a means of reintegrating drug users into the community.

Third is the provision of support to individuals at risk or impacted by organized crime. This does not only entail protective support, but also legal, financial, health and education assistance. Practically this can take the form of violence shelters, hotlines, and reintegration assistance for community members previously involved in illicit economies (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021).

In Haiti, for example, the CSO *Rapha* has worked to address the issues of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This is particularly important for the country, as, in recent years proliferating violence by criminal armed groups has triggered a crisis of forced internal displacement in a number of disadvantaged and marginalised communities. This displacement, exacerbated by continuing insecurity, has led to a situation of extreme social and economic vulnerability for those displaced, and exposed, many – particularly women and children – to an increased risk of sexual exploitation.

To address this, *Rapha* has sought to assist and aid victims directly, as well as build the resilience of high-risk communities and improve the capacity of state protection structures. In February 2020, *Rapha* launched a program to identify and help vulnerable people, via the provision of psychosocial and medical care to both victims of sexual exploitation and heads of household in vulnerable communities. Gerson Nozea, from *Rapha*, explains that "among the victims, families internally displaced due to organised crime now have access to safe housing, women heads of households have launched income-generating initiatives, and a network of cooperation and support has been created for women heads of small business enterprises."⁴

Fourth is information sharing and awareness. While local information on the manifestations of organized crime and criminal governance may exist, broader knowledge about organized crime, the nature of challenges in other locales or regions, and successful resilience efforts elsewhere is often limited or non-existent. This, in turn, effectively poses "a structural barrier to building resilience" (Gastelum Felix and Tennnant, forthcoming). Non-state organizations focused on research, journalism and education are keenly important in addressing these gaps, though often these same organizations need support and time to build the specific knowledge on organized crime issues (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021).

Finally, resilience activities are – fundamentally – about community building. Ideally, resilience activities should be aimed both at retarding the key challenges communities face, and

enhancing issues and ethical approaches communities hold dear (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021). The latter, in particular, is keenly important within the ‘build back better’ approach to resilience.

Community building, however, does not simply entail the strengthening of bonds within geographically distinct communities, but also the building of a community of individuals and organizations working on resilience building issues. At a local level, such connectivity is particularly important to prevent large numbers of unconnected and uncoordinated actors and initiatives within a given community fragment rather than reinforce resilience building efforts (Davis, 2012).

There is, however, also a utility in strengthening global bonds amongst resilience actors. As will be detailed in greater depth in the following section, resilience building can be a dangerous activity, with efforts often surveilled by both governments and criminal organizations, and activists sometimes harassed, intimidated and attacked.

Challenges to resilience building

The narratives of building and rebuilding resilience are arguably powerful and positive, offering an avenue to marginalized communities and individuals to non-violently address challenges emanating from organized crime. However, they are not easy. The situations in which communities seek to enhance resilience are frequently unsafe, and rife with spoilers – including both criminals and states – whose interests run counter to or differ from those of communities. Simply, individuals, organizations and communities working on resilience often do so at great cost to themselves, while menaced by an ever-growing set of challenges.

The most dire challenge facing resilience proponents is physical violence and murder. Targeted killings – especially those of activists involved in countering environmental crime and journalists reporting on organized crime – have long been an issue, but it has become more acute over the last two decades as criminal groups have grown in global scope and power. In Mexico alone, 137 journalists were killed between 2000 and 2020 (Triana, 2021). Mexican journalist Javier Valdez, murdered on 17 May 2017, once explained the risks he faced, noting:

In Culiacán (Mexico), living is dangerous, and working as a journalist means treading an invisible line drawn by the bad guys from both the drug cartels and the government – a sharp floor covered with explosives (The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020).

As intimated by Valdez, the risk comes not just from organized crime actors. Police and other security forces officials, acting either as hired assassins or due to complicity in criminal activity, have also been implicated in the killing of journalists and activists (The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020).

The goal of such killings is often two-fold. In part, the killings are aimed at silencing actors and halting initiatives which criminal actors perceive as threatening their business interests or a status quo advantageous to them. In some instances, such as with journalists, the goal can also be to prevent the dissemination of information highlighting links between criminals and state actors.

Targeted killings, however, are also intended to intimidate, implicitly threatening the broader social networks, community and society of those killed. Murder is not the only form of intimidation which resilience actors, and their communities, face. In a number of instances documented by the authors, criminal actors have resorted to cyber harassment or physical

threats. In others, criminal actors have publicly sought out activists, overtly querying community members as to the activist's location and activities.⁵ In some cases, state agents have been implicated in intimidation efforts, including targeting family members of murdered journalists (The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020; Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021; Triana, 2021).

Resilience activists have also been menaced by a rise in legal intimidation. Defamation suits, for example, have emerged as key approaches by actors seeking to target and deter individuals and activists working against organized crime. One activist who had been reporting on crime and corruption issues around the illicit mining industry, was sued for defamation by one of the alleged criminals involved. The suit led to the temporary seizure of the activist's organization, as well as other harassment of the organization's staff. Despite the ultimate dismissal of some lawsuits, the process can often be ruinously expensive for activists, forcing a halt to their activities and deterring others from becoming involved in resilience work.

Intimidation has always been a key tool of TOC activities, such as extortion and territorial control, due to the limited risk it involves for criminal actors, with police and security forces often less likely to investigate or prosecute it. Intimidation, however, can have a particularly acute chilling effect on efforts to buttress community resilience, impacting both the willingness of community members to discuss the challenges they face and efforts to address them (Connolly, 2019; Gastrow, 2021).

Apart from active threats from criminal actors meant to halt and deter resilience work, there are also inherent risks in the nature of some specific forms of resilience building. The most direct of these is gang mediation, where resilience actors are seeing to limit violence between antagonistic, often heavily armed groups of youth. One Liberian mediator explained that that "with gang violence, you have the physical situation where you can be physically attacked if people misunderstand your position while you're trying to facilitate."⁶

In addition to the challenges detailed above, resilience actors also face some very specific risks posed by states and state agents. While in an ideal situation, the latter actors should be proponents of resilience building, too often communities face predatory states that view resilience-building efforts with deep distrust. Amerhauser and Kemp, writing about resilience in the Western Balkans note that "In some cases, positions [between governments and CSOs] become entrenched to the point that one or both sides regard the other as 'the enemy,' which is unfortunate given that fighting organized crime should be a shared goal" (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021).

Antipathy and mistrust of resilience actors by governments can sometimes lead to the intentional weaponization of state resources, to include physical assaults or murder by state agents, or intimidation via the legal system. However, more frequently, state efforts which curtail the activities of resilience actors occur via broader policy or legal initiatives.

Moves in recent years to expand defamation laws, especially to encompass speech on social media platforms, are one example of this, as detailed previously on legal intimidation (International Press Institute, 2020; Guterres, 2020). In some cases, such as in Mexico and Niger, government actors, or those linked to powerful officials, have been protagonists in such suits seeking to halt reporting on corruption or organized crime links (Edmonds-Poli, 2014; The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020).

Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (AML/CTF) policies have also emerged as a problematic issue for resilience actors. In some instances, this is due to the instrumentalization of such policies by governments to harass and target resilience actors, such as in Serbia in July 2020, when the government issued a list of journalists and NGOs whose bank accounts were to be reviewed for AML/CTF violations (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021). Such instrumentalized

approaches can be a particular issue in locales where criminals and state actors are closely interlinked (Knoote and Malmberg, 2021).

However, a more sustained challenge emanates from the underlying structure of AML/CTF legislation, including best practices promoted by international organizations. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a key AML/CTF standard setter, has recommended the regulation of the non-profit sector since the 1990s. This despite both FATF and other international actors, such as the World Bank and European Commission, acknowledging the limited risk NGOs pose for terrorist financing (Knoote and Malmberg, 2021).

FATF's promotion of non-profit regulation has furthered efforts by governments to control and target NGOs, all under the patina of an AML/CTF approach. This, in turn has led to operational, financial, and legal ramifications for such organizations. Already limited donor support for resilience activities against organized crime are further impeded by the difficulty recipient organizations have in navigating and adhering to strict AML/CTF requirements (Amerhauser and Kemp, 2021). Knoote and Malmberg, in reviewing the issue, note a "policy incoherence on the national and international arena: the very organizations whose mandate is to fight organized crime, corruption or terrorism, are being hampered in their valuable work by CFT/AML regulations" (Knoote and Malmberg, 2021).

Smuggling, stabilization and the risk of securitization

Securitized approaches to organized crime, smuggling and illicit markets are a final aspect of official policy which shape the activities and challenges of resilience actors. Much of this hinges on the counterintuitive stabilizing impact of some forms of smuggling and illicit markets. As a range of chapters in this volume have noted, in areas where economic opportunities are limited, smuggling and illicit markets are a key livelihood support strategy for local communities. This is especially the case for contraband activities in which barriers to entry are low and financial stakes widely distributed (Herbert, 2019).

Activities which contravene national laws do not necessarily contravene local social norms, nor are they considered taboo. Herbert and Gallien underscore, for example, that on the Tunisia-Algeria border, low level smugglers rarely perceive their activities to be deviant, even if they are criminal, with one Tunisian smuggler explaining "What we do is not really illegal trafficking" (Herbert and Gallien, 2020). This dynamic is not limited only to individuals directly involved in smuggling, but rather is reflected in the broader social context of many communities where smuggling or illicit trade is perceived as a livelihood necessity. Witbooi underscores this, noting that "research conducted on gangs elsewhere in Jamaica, particularly in Kingston, suggests a significant degree of tolerance, if not support, for the social benefits that these illicit activities bring vulnerable communities" (Witbooi, 2020).

Officials too can allow tacitly some forms of smuggling, turning a blind eye to cross-border commerce as long as specific norms and unofficial rules are adhered to by smugglers (Herbert, 2019; Gallien, 2019). This is often based upon the rationalization that the risks of destabilization and protests in the borderlands substantially exceed the dangers posed by low level smuggling (Hanlon and Herbert, 2015).

The advent of new security threats, including violent organized crime groups or terrorist networks perceived to be enabled by smuggling networks, can change this calculus, however. In such circumstances, states can seek to adopt blunt, security-focused strategies as a means of mitigating the risk.

However, government efforts to address nominally illegal activity and markets via securitized approaches that do not incorporate alternative development efforts acceptable to local

communities risk primarily impacting small scale smugglers. Such actors have limited ability to surmount concerted government security or border closure campaigns, which, in turn can lead to destabilization of borderland communities.

In North Africa, for example, the governments of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco substantially shifted their border security strategies between 2011 and 2020, moving from defacto tolerance of low-level smuggling to militarized approaches which sought to halt smuggling and other unauthorized cross-border movement. The net impact of this shift was to create a crisis in the region's borderlands, leading to an increase in social tension, irregular migration and involvement in more violent forms of criminality, such as drug trafficking (Herbert and Gallien, 2020). Similar unintended consequences can be seen with other securitized approaches, including that of early 'Mano Dura' policies in Central America's Northern Triangle or initiatives pursued in Afghanistan around narcotics cultivation (Jones, 2014; Goodhand, 2009; Gutierrez, 2020; Koehler, Rasool and Ibrahimkhel, 2021).

Thus, even in cases in which state intentions are nominally positive, poorly thought through policy approaches to informal and illicit economies, especially on what is meant to replace them, lead to a negative effect on community livelihoods and security. This, in turn, can increase the need for resilience actors, both to address the negative ramifications of state action and to address criminal entrepreneurs – such as drug traffickers in North Africa – who seek to profit from the upending of previously established markets and systems to increase their own power and influence.

Finally, securitized approaches also pose a risk to resilience actors, especially those perceived to oppose government approaches or maintain connections to criminals (such as resilience actors involved in gang mediation). In such instances, resilience actors can face investigation, harassment and physical violence by state agents not due to the initiatives they promote, but rather due to the broader social networks they and their communities exist within.

Conclusion

As the chapters in this book underscore, the negative impacts which manifest when smuggling economies have become penetrated or dominated by organised crime groups has emerged as a increasing global challenge. Much of the attention has focused on the macro-level impacts, such as state capture, rule of law erosion, and the functional ejection of state presence from areas dominated by organized crime actors. The micro-experience of organized crime has been more opaque, such as how communities deal with heightened insecurity and the rise of criminal governance. However, such a micro-focus is important, because it is out of these local contexts that some of the most active and successful efforts to deal with the impacts of organized crime are emerging.

In a vast range of countries and contexts globally, community activists, journalists and NGOs are working, often in circumstances of acute personal risk, to aid communities impacted by organized crime in addressing the damaging ramifications of the phenomenon. These resilience efforts are, in effect, efforts at stabilization from below, grounded in local context and responsive to local needs. Support of them should be key components of national and donor efforts to address organized crime.

National and international supporters, however, should not make the mistake of viewing community resilience as an end state in itself. Resilience is instead a multi-level continuum, with different levels – individual, family, community, national – deploying coping strategies to different effect at different times as organized crime risks and threats change (Davis, 2012). Because of this, support should be both durable and focused at connecting resilience actors with their peers, to ensure that good practices and approaches can be spread, innovated and employed.

International actors – including both donors and the research community – should also remain attuned to the challenges faced by local individuals and organizations working on resilience. Those working on the ground are doing so against an ever-increasing set of challenges, and often at great personal risk.

Finally, while the focus of this chapter has largely been on how communities act to build resilience in the absence of the state, or its capture by criminal actors, promoters of resilience should not lose sight of the need to bring the state back into the conversation. Ultimately, if community efforts to counter organized crime are to be effective and durable, the state must play a role. The challenge then is to build trust and connections between state officials and community actors, and ensure that local knowledge and understanding fits both local administration and more national level responses to organized crime. This is particularly challenging, and yet highly salient, in communities where livelihoods are predicated upon smuggling and forms of petty contraband, and which the risk of destabilization is significant if state approaches to combat organized crime are bluntly applied.

The challenge posed by transnational organized crime is likely to continue to grow in the coming years and decades. This in turn, necessitates that those in the international community – such as governments, civil society, and academia – continue to work to support those resilience actors working on the ground and promulgate the novel solutions and approaches they come up with.

Notes

- 1 The authors would like to emphasize that while smuggling and organized crime are interrelated, they should not be construed as synonymous. Organized crime groups can emanate from smuggling networks, as the advent of high value goods leads to heightened barriers to entry, and a subsequent concentration of power and profit within specific groups and individuals. They can also become involved in taxing smugglers moving goods across a given territory, in some cases acting as gatekeepers on which individuals or groups can be active in smuggling activities. However, on a per person basis, members of organized crime groups are a distinct minority within the broader universe of smuggling.
- 2 Beginning in 2019, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime launched the Resilience Fund to further support community and civil society responding to organized crime. The Resilience Fund not only provides financial support to its grantees but builds capacity of its beneficiaries by offering a learning curricula and networking opportunities, along with mentoring and other programmes to amplify the local impact of the projects and share lessons internationally, while building a global community of resilience actors.
- 3 Author Interview, Yesid Perlaza, remote, 2020.
- 4 Author interview, Gerson Nozea, remote 2020.
- 5 Author communication, activist, remote, April 2021.
- 6 Global Initiative interview, Yvette Chesson-Wurch, remote, September 2020.

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