

# URBAN SAFETY BRIEF No. 1/2023

## The Case for Safety Audits for Community Safety at City Level

This Urban Safety Brief is about the institutionalisation of safety audits and their critical role in data and evidence collection for better designed safety measures..

The SA Cities Urban Safety Reference Group's Briefs Series is designed to distil the state of current knowledge on urban safety-related topics for a policy and planning audience.



### BACKGROUND

"A community safety audit is a process of reviewing (generally) public spaces / urban areas and making recommendations about how they can be improved to prevent crime and promote community safety."<sup>1</sup> Cities around the world have been exploring different tools to improve safety and prevent crime in their locality. A safety audit is one such tool.

The European Forum for Urban Safety (EFUS) (2007:10) defines a safety audit as "a systematic analysis undertaken to gain an understanding of the crime and victimisation-related problems in a city; to identify assets and resources for preventive activity; to enable priorities to be identified; and to help shape a strategy that will enable those priorities to be tackled." The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs expands this by defining a Local Safety Audit (LSA) as a tool that is used to understand the underlying social dynamics that enable crime and violence<sup>2</sup>. SALGA (2016) adds that a community safety audit is a process that must be used to review public spaces and make recommendations about how they can be improved to prevent crime and promote community safety.

In order for responses to unsafety to be crafted at local level in response to local challenges, data on unsafety must also be generated at the local level. National, provincial even regional crime statistics provide only a glimpse into very limited aspects of unsafety – and often describe issues that do not relate to municipal mandates. Incidence of rape cannot tell how many incidents were not reported, what environmental factors created the circumstances that enabled the incident to happen, which specific locations are most unsafe for victims, what socio-political factors created vulnerability for the victim, including gender, race, age and socio-economic status. Safety audits are information gathering tools which are used in communities to gather experiential evidence from users of public space on safety, factors contributing to safety and factors undermining safety. They include surveys, group walks, digital tools and mapping exercises. Safety audits place a value on qualitative data and create a framework for integrating qualitative and quantitative data into the design and implementation of safety interventions. A local safety audit provides rich and nuanced information about the local environment, which cannot be conveyed in crime statistics alone.

Safety audits provide the foundation for strategies that are effective in preventing crime and improving quality of life for citizens.

This brief is structured into three sections:

1. An introduction to safety audits, including history, best contemporary practices and content.



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2. A discussion on the limitations of safety audits, including learning from history about their content and a discussion on the gaps in their application, which will link to the institutionalisation recommendations.
3. A section with reference to other assessment tools and their institutionalisation and recommendations on how to formally integrate safety audits into planning processes.

## DISCUSSION

### 01 Safety Audits

#### The Use of Safety Audits at City-Level

Over the past 20 years, safety audits of one kind or another have been incorporated into the development of many city safety strategies. Safety audits may be conducted at different scales in a city depending on the budget or reason for data collection. Safety audits may be conducted at city scale, precinct or neighbourhood scale or at site<sup>3</sup>.

City budgets are often tight and resources and capacities, particularly for safety-related interventions scarce (Sutil interview, 2023). Municipalities need data to understand the key components of the root causes of unsafety, the unsafe hotspots and the nature of unsafety, to implement targeted interventions with limited resources. In other words, while there is extensive theoretical guidance regarding the links between users and those who live in the city, the purpose of particular places and their uses as well as the time of day or night that people need access to them, it is not possible for the city to fix all the issues that fall short of safety best practice. Safety audits, in sourcing localised data, offer insights into criminal activity and incidents, as well as people’s perceptions of unsafety and therefore assist cities in targeting key priorities.



Figure 1: The flow of safety information at city level

#### Integrating Safety Audit Data with Crime Stats and other Tools

Safety audits combine data drawn from crime statistics disaggregated to the most immediate level with additional safety audit tools such as surveys, expert and other informant interviews and informal information sharing mechanisms such as WhatsApp groups. In times of crisis, where crime is particularly bad in a locality, safety audits can also be very useful in better understanding crime trends over time. Just as crime stats don’t provide a full picture on their own, different kinds of crime don’t show up in safety audits. They are not a stand-alone tool and responding to their findings requires committed and trusting partnership within the municipality and with other stakeholders such as the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Community-based Organisations (CBOs). Safety audits provide data on what affects communities at the interface. When integrated, crime stats and audits help police understand where and why different crimes happen (Lancaster interview,2023).

An example of safety audit data that has been followed through into a format where data is visible and useful is in a project called Safe Women, Safer Cities<sup>4</sup>. The project enabled the collection of data relating directly to the mandates of the municipality through Safetipin mobile app technologies. It focused not on crimes and crime statistics but on the way in which design, management and maintenance of public spaces have an impact on the safety of those who move through the city to access opportunities, services and public spaces. One key achievement of the project was the integration of Safetipin data into the city dashboard to make it more meaningful for city officials<sup>5</sup>. The data, when analysed, provides practical recommendations to municipal departments and city stakeholders. The data also enables women to make choices about where they go, what routes they choose and when it is safe to travel.

#### Tools Used To Conduct Safety Audits

European Forum for Urban Safety (EFUS) has long promoted the safety audit approach. This is evident in their 2007 Guidance on Local Safety Audits: A Compendium of International Practice which outlines how collected data can be used as evidence in projects<sup>6</sup>. In 2016 EFUS published Methods and tools for Strategic Approach to Urban Security which provided a framework for developing and implementing safety audits. According to the Civilian Secretariat for Police Services, “safety audits are analytic tools towards developing prevention strategies and are widely recognised by international agencies such as the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nation (UN) Office on Drugs and Crime, UN-Habitat, the World Health Organisation, the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime and the EFUS.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the years safety audits have evolved<sup>8</sup>, they have shifted from being general, with no specific gendered focus, to sourcing data on specific information and relevant issues such as the safety of women<sup>9</sup>. Women’s safety audit tools have proliferated, driven by high rates of violence against women in the city. According to the United Nations

physical environmental changes, there are other, less-obvious positive results reported from the use of the women's safety audit. Several sources describe how the audit process has increased awareness of the effects of violence on both women and the community at large." This has been taken a step further by organisations such as Safetipin which has digitised safety audits to enable continuous interaction between city administrations, city space and women living in those cities. "Both safety and gender are cross-cutting issues and should be mainstreamed in all levels of governance and areas of competencies as a condition for sustainable development."<sup>10</sup> In many cities, women are categorised as vulnerable and are often clustered with other vulnerable groups such as people with special needs, the elderly, and children. Intersectionality highlights the way that gender interacts with other social and physiological categories such as ability, race, class, and religion. While patriarchy positions women one way in relation to men, the social construct of class means that the experience of middle-class women and poor women is also different.

Women are most often in the majority and their vulnerability comes from the roles that they undertake. Sometimes this vulnerability prevents them from realising their full potential and from participating fully in opportunities and municipal processes. Safety audits that collect data specifically from women are particularly useful because women have a complex relationship with the city<sup>11</sup> and with mobility.

## 02 Limitations to the Usefulness of Safety Audits

### The Usefulness of Safety Audits in Crime Prevention

All cities should offer quality public space that is accessible to all, and that has useful amenities.<sup>12</sup> Safety audits can support municipal officials to identify priorities for safe and accessible spaces and amenities, within budget and capacity limitations. Where municipal officials are engaged in establishing the purpose and design of safety audits they can frame questions that respond directly to the need to prioritise, balancing community demand with municipal capability. Given that municipalities are often severely constrained in their ability to respond to issues raised, audits should reflect this constraint and create reasonable and achievable expectations (Douglas interview, 2023).

Any research includes an important component of communication and the messaging here needs to be, we ask these questions to enable us to be as responsive as possible, by best understanding your priority needs for safety at a local level, within the context of our budget constraints.

In designing safety audits, municipalities can fall into the trap of asking many more questions than they have the capacity or resources to respond to. The design of a safety audit should be aligned to

existing plans and expectations of the multiple departments and other stakeholders who will ultimately be accountable for responding to the expectations which can be raised by capturing data in respect of issues to which the city does not have the capacity to respond. As with all research, the outcomes of safety audits are only as relevant as the questions asked. While safety audit methodologies are usually the outcome of wide consultation, many lean towards the academic, asking questions that are disconnected from municipal mandates, and which sometimes create expectations that cannot be met. When the right questions are asked, safety audits can be used to investigate and address issues such as street lighting, signages, pathways, potential hotspots for street mugging etc. (Lancaster interview, 2023).

### The Impact of Safety Audits in Crime Prevention

Safety audits offer an opportunity to think about safety in terms of lived experience as opposed to measured by crime and violence statistics. Crime and violence statistics are published regularly by the SAPS and are readily available, while safety audits require capacity and resources to be facilitated directly by municipalities themselves. This makes crime statistics an attractive source for assessing local safety. The municipality does not have a direct mandate or capacity for shifting crime and violence incidence, but they do have the mandate to create safe and conducive public spaces. A safety audit which places value on the experiences of safety of users of public space can respond to those experiences by improving lighting and visibility, creating open and accessible pathways, promoting passive surveillance. The use of crime statistics as the metric for crime prevention tends to prompt expensive surveillance and target hardening interventions which suck up municipal budgets, require more capacity than the city has to be properly responsive<sup>13</sup>, and do not in themselves contribute to vibrancy and well-being, which are central to the mandate of the municipality. Safety audits can prompt municipalities to link their mandates for maintenance and design of conducive infrastructure to people's experience of safety in direct, manageable and mandate-aligned ways.

### The Role of Partnership and Collaboration in Safety: Implementing Safety Audit Recommendations

The German Development Cooperation Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and National Treasury (2021) in the Dimensions of Safety in Precinct Management and Development Guide highlight and emphasise the importance of partnerships in violence and crime prevention, "when we accept that urban safety can only be achieved through integrated, collaborative responses, it is necessary to innovate to better activate and sustain partnerships<sup>14</sup>." Partnerships are crucial in building safer communities. This is evident in the nature of Area-Based Violence Prevention Interventions (ABVPI), the approach clearly indicates the importance of partnerships and how strong and healthy partnerships can strengthen prevention interventions (Isandla Institute, 2021b:14).

A safety audit can be viewed as a tool for establishing partnerships and improving trust between local governments, the police, community and other stakeholders working together to prevent crime and violence<sup>16</sup>. A naturally collective and inclusive exercise, a safety audit prompts partners to listen to one another’s insights and experiences and builds mutual understanding and trust.

### 03 Institutionalised Mandate to Implement The Learning Through The Safety Audit

Safety is the concern of many if not all South Africans. For municipalities, crime and violence are a barrier to the achievement of important social and economic goals; it is harder to attract and sustain investment in an unsafe environment, and people are less likely to contribute to the creation of vibrant and safe neighbourhoods when they are scared and locked away from what they perceive to be dangerous spaces<sup>17</sup>.

The objectives of local government as defined in Section 152 (d) of the Constitution are:

1. To provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
2. To ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
3. To promote social and economic development;
4. To promote a safe and healthy environment; and
5. To encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government.

Local governments’ mandate includes creating a conducive environment, maintaining the space, accessible transport and mobility, providing services, access to opportunities, design and planning, by-laws, crime prevention and communication<sup>18</sup>. Isandla Institute (2021b:04) state that, “municipalities have an explicit responsibility to promote safety, address risk factors that underminesafety and bolster the protective factors that enable safety and community resilience.” The 2016 White Paper on Safety and Security also has specific relevance to the management of safety at a local level, and explicitly notes the importance of local government in achieving and maintaining safety. The WPSS places primary responsibility for the delivery of safety and violence prevention with local government and identifies the roles of municipalities. It is importance to note that local governments mandate is broader than safety as stipulated by the Constitution.

#### LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANDATE

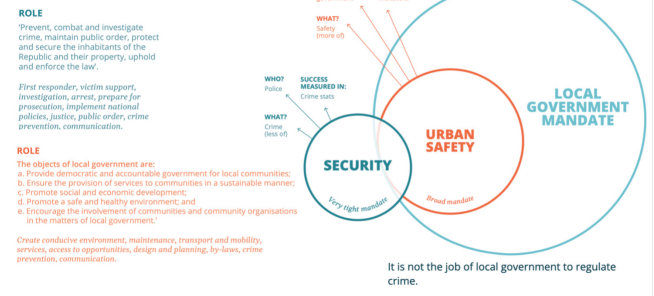


Figure 2: Local Government Mandate<sup>19</sup>

Research reveals that most country responses to crime have favoured policing, the criminal justice system and private security agencies as key components in any strategy. These are costly and often do not address motivation for crime and violence<sup>20</sup>. Although policing and security interventions are costly, more funding is typically available for infrastructure and securitised approaches than social crime prevention and institutional support interventions (GIZ and National Treasury, 2021). This highlights that budgets for preventative safety interventions are limited, which leaves little or no room for municipalities to integrate and implement recommendations that emerge from safety audits. This can only be resolved, and proven as valuable, when cities encourage all departments/units to have a safety budget to respond to safety audit recommendations (Dugmore interview, 2023). The CSPA adds that, “safety goes beyond the mandate of policing and that other provincial and local government departments too have been neglecting their role and mandate in contributing to safety.”

### 04 How to Formally Institutionalise Safety Audits

The lack of institutional capacity and coordination has been identified as a critical weakness in the implementation of safety audits. It is widely known and has been repeated on several occasions that municipalities have limited resources. Resources and capacities are not the only challenges when it comes to integrating safety audit recommendations into planning and implementation processes but personalities also play a huge role (Viswanath interview, 2023). It is vital that officials understand safety and how it is impacted by or impacts their mandates (Mbatha interview, 2023). A city like eThekweni is fortunate to have the Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE), an internal learning institution, which can provide a platform for learning and improving officials understanding of safety (Shembe interview, 2023). Safety must be seen as a complex problem that requires transversal approaches within a municipality. SALGA (2016) states that, “safety planning requires strong local leadership of mayors, city managers, city planners and safety audits” to ensure that interventions respond to identified needs or challenges.



## CONCLUSION

It is important that municipalities understand and accept their role in safety. They must also advance the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design mainly in the development of human settlements, in formal and informal areas<sup>21</sup>. EFUS (2007:07) emphasises that “throughout the process, review and evaluation should ensure that future action is informed by experience. The process needs to be inclusive and participative, not only to ensure that relevant interests are properly considered, but to enable the city to benefit from the active involvement of stakeholders and communities.” Cities need to recognise and understand that this is an ongoing process, audits and strategies need to be updated periodically as issues and priorities change in local communities<sup>22</sup>. Safety audits are a fundamental part of any plan, they should be a stand-alone chapter in policy and planning processes (Van Niekerk interview, 2023), but should be scaled to the ability of the municipality to respond.

Safety audits do not solve the problem of the complexity of crime and it's causes, but they make clear links between municipal mandates and unsafety. Strategically used, they are a tool for improving safety and therefore for improving the service of the police, who are often themselves overwhelmed by high rates of crime that are committed in part in response to opportunities created by poor planning, visibility, minimal use of public spaces and low trust in key relationships.

### Recommendations.

- Transversal understanding of safety should be a precursor to institutionalisation of safety audits.
- Knowledge management should be institutionalised before safety audits can be truly effective.
- Research tools should be co-designed with implementing departments to ensure relevance and capacity/capability to respond.
- There should be alignment of budgets, transversal understanding of the impact of crime and vandalism on budgets.
- Safety audits should only ask mandate related questions, unless there is separate, clearly understood reason to ask other questions.
- Safety audits can be expensive and time consuming, particularly if conducted at whole city level. They should be used strategically.
- Data does not have a long life because crime moves and circumstances change. Audits need to be designed and conducted with this in mind.
- It is important to note just as crime statistics don't provide a full picture on their own, there are types of crime that show up in safety audits. They are not a stand-alone tool and responding to their findings requires committed and trusting partnership within the municipality and other stakeholders such as the SAPS and CBOs.
- A supportive compliance framework for planning processes:
  - o Keep a measure of flexibility to keep responses to safety audits current

- o Link to community safety planning processes
- o Think about scale – which scale we should be focusing on?
- o Resourcing – make them affordable
- o Link to policies (IDP Spatial Development Frameworks (SDF))

### End notes.

- 1 Clancey. CHD Partners' Community Safety Audit Methodology. Fairfield City Council Package. Available from: [https://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/your\\_council/council/safety\\_audit\\_factsheet-1.pdf](https://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/your_council/council/safety_audit_factsheet-1.pdf).
  - 2 The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs adds that, “by analysing the local context at the maximum level of geographical disaggregation, an LSA allows for the design, monitoring and evaluation of wide-range evidence-based policies in the medium and long terms. In Mexico, its methodology involved a mixed approach where the collection of quantitative information from official statistical and geographical sources was complemented with qualitative information from a participatory social diagnosis.” Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/local-safety-audit-queretaro-municipality>
  - 3 A City may conduct a safety audit at (i) City scale to understand the most unsafe and safe areas to direct resources and interventions and also to understand what the key elements are making one area safe versus another. In the South African context this could be as part of IDP research or for a City-wide safety strategy. Audits can also be used at (ii) precinct or neighbourhood scale for more nuanced understanding of exactly where within a specific place and what elements are making a place unsafe (no lighting, disrupted stormwater drainage, men drinking alcohol, no people making use of the area at all, no eyes on the street etc.). Then a City may also make use of safety audits to understand current issues and deficits of a particular (iii) site (a park, a taxi rank, a bridge) as part of a design input to ensure that the redesign of that public infrastructure takes into consideration CPTED principles and context-specific user requirements.
  - 4 Guidebook available from: <https://safetipin.com/report/guidebook-on-safe-women-safer-cities/>
  - 5 Safe Women, Safer Cities. Available from: <https://safetipin.com/report/guidebook-on-safe-women-safer-cities/>
  - 6 To read more about this: <https://efus.eu/topics/audits-methodology/the-efus-safety-audit-guide-a-guide-to-better-understand-new-challenges-in-urban-security/>
  - 7 Civilian Secretariat for Police Services. 2018/19 Community Safety Audit Consolidated Report. A Joint Study with the Provincial Secretariats. Available from: [http://www.policesecretariat.gov.za/downloads/reports/Final\\_Consolidated\\_Community\\_Safety\\_Audit.pdf](http://www.policesecretariat.gov.za/downloads/reports/Final_Consolidated_Community_Safety_Audit.pdf)
  - 8 Some of the safety audit tools include:
    - The Women's Safety Audit: is a tool that enables a critical evaluation of the urban environment to better understand the status of women's access to safe public spaces. This tool was developed by Women in Cities International (WCI) in 2008 and used in several cities internationally.
    - Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) Standard Operation Procedure GBV Safety Audit (2019): assess specific vulnerabilities of women, girls, boys, and men to those identified risks and to identify actions to be taken to reduce those risks and/or vulnerabilities.
    - Safetipin: designed and developed to source and use lived experience data related to public spaces and routes. These technologies include a mobile app that can be used by women to conduct their own and crowd-sourced audits, as well as to consult the outcomes of audits to plan and use routes. Data offer insights into the way that women use or do not use the city, and the way that safety and unsafety contribute to their choices.
    - HerCity Toolbox: is a digital platform that increases the capacity of end users to plan for a city that can belong to everyone. The initiative supports urban development from a girl's perspective. The toolbox offers agency to girls and young women to contribute to their own safety.
  - 9 More information available from: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/1404462831/wpdm\\_Women%27s%20Safety%20Audit.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/1404462831/wpdm_Women%27s%20Safety%20Audit.pdf)
  - 10 <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/public-spaces>
  - 11 Civilian Secretariat for Police Services. 2018/19 Community Safety Audit Consolidated Report.
  - 12 <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/public-spaces>
  - 13 For more information: <https://www.sacities.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Urban-Safety-Policy-Brief-2022.pdf>
  - 14 National Treasury & German Development Cooperation Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). 2021. Dimensions of Safety in Precinct Management and Development Guide.
  - 15 For more information: [https://sandia.org.za/en/projects/sprint/Item/download/289\\_44cc1fcb88190ef780b6215e01d80](https://sandia.org.za/en/projects/sprint/Item/download/289_44cc1fcb88190ef780b6215e01d80)
  - 16 “A Safety Audit is a partnership among residents, community groups, local businesses, neighbourhood institutions and government. It helps your neighbourhood feel like a safer place by enabling you to assess how safe or unsafe you and your neighbours currently feel in your surroundings. It facilitates communication with your neighbours, local merchants, neighbourhood schools, Community Services Centre, Police Neighbourhood Foot Patrol, and other stakeholders to address safety problems and bring about solutions that will make your neighbourhood a safer place for you and your family.” <https://www.edmonton.ca/public-files/assets/document?path=PDF/SCACSafetyAuditGuide.pdf>
  - 17 SAFE WOMEN, SAFER CITIES. AVAILABLE FROM: [HTTPS://SAFETIPIN.COM/REPORT/GUIDEBOOK-ON-SAFE-WOMEN-SAFER-CITIES/](https://safetipin.com/report/guidebook-on-safe-women-safer-cities/)
  - 18 Safe Women, Safer Cities. Available from: <https://safetipin.com/report/guidebook-on-safe-women-safer-cities/>.
  - 19 Safe Women, Safer Cities. Available from: <https://safetipin.com/report/guidebook-on-safe-women-safer-cities/>
  - 20 According to EFUS (2007:05), “Prevention involves reducing the risk of crime and its harmful effects, including fear, through interventions directed at the underlying conditions (or ‘risk factors’) linked with its occurrence.
- The Scope Of Crime Prevention
1. Promoting the well-being of people and encouraging pro-social behaviour through social, economic, health and educational measures, with a particular emphasis on children and youth, and focusing on the risk and protective factors associated with crime and victimisation (prevention through social development or social crime prevention)
  2. Changing the conditions in neighbourhoods that influence offending, victimisation and the insecurity that results from crime by building on the initiatives, expertise and commitment of community members (locally based crime prevention)
  3. Reducing opportunities, increasing risks of being apprehended and minimising benefits of crime, including through environmental design, and by providing assistance and information to potential and actual victims (situational crime prevention)
  4. Reverting recidivism by assisting in the social reintegration of offenders and other preventive mechanisms (reintegration programmes).” Available from: [https://www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/EFUS\\_Safety\\_Audit\\_e\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/EFUS_Safety_Audit_e_WEB.pdf)
- 21 Civilian Secretariat for Police Services. 2018/19 Community Safety Audit Consolidated Report.
  - 22 To read more about this: <https://efus.eu/topics/audits-methodology/the-efus-safety-audit-guide-a-guide-to-better-understand-new-challenges-in-urban-security/>

The brief was compiled by the SA Cities Urban Safety Reference Group.

The Urban Safety Reference Group is a platform for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing among practitioners from the SACN participating cities as well as other key government role-players on urban safety and violence prevention. It is convened by the South African Cities Network (SACN) with the support of the GIZ Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention (VCP) Programme.

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