

Effect of Financial products and services Cash and in-kind transfers on Willingness to participate or to help

Financial aid has a small effect on willingness to participate or help by easing economic pressures and supporting engagement

Geographic Location: Sub Saharan Africa and Middle East & North Africa

Effect: small effect ($g=0.047$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (3 studies with 20 effect sizes)

Short Summary:

Cash-based interventions influence community members' willingness to participate and provide support. Evidence from the studies shows that cash grants, combined with training or employment programs, can have positive effects on engagement, though these effects are often modest or time-limited. For example, Blattman (2014) found that a training program initially increased community participation, but the effect plateaued after four years. Kimou (2019) observed that short-term employment programs initially decreased trust but ultimately increased community involvement, trust in peers, and pro-peace attitudes. Lehmann (2014) found that cash assistance to Syrian refugees improved access to education by reducing child labor, thereby supporting participation in community activities. Overall, the interventions had measurable but small effects on willingness to engage.

Long summary

The Intervention:

This interventions included microcredit, microinsurance, and microsavings programs (including village savings and loan associations), financial literacy support, and both cash and in-kind transfers. These also included social safety nets and short-term cash-for-work programs, providing support conditional on work or combined with additional components such as vocational training, skills development, or health services.

How the Intervention is expected to work:

The interventions aimed to enhance social participation and community engagement by providing economic support and skills development. Cash transfers were intended to reduce immediate financial pressures, allowing recipients to participate more actively in education, employment, and community activities. Vocational or employment training programs sought to improve skills, promote income generation, and foster trust and cooperation within communities. In practice, the combination of economic support and training was expected to improve willingness to participate, although results varied by context and program design

The Evidence Base:

The cell contains 3 studies: and 3 impact evaluations. All studies are RCTs.

The evidence base includes research conducted in Cote D'Ivoire (1 study), Uganda (1 study) and Syrian refugees in Lebanon (1 study).

Evidence Findings:

The evidence shows mixed impacts on willingness to participate or help. Blattman found that the training program initially increased community participation, but the effect diminished over time. Hidrobo reported that food, cash, and voucher interventions increased participation, with vouchers showing the largest effect on social involvement and sharing behaviors. Kimou observed that short-term employment reduced trust initially, but longer-term opportunities enhanced community participation and pro-peace attitudes. Lehmann found that winter cash assistance for Syrian refugees reduced child labor and increased educational participation, supporting greater engagement in community activities. Overall, the interventions had a small but positive effect on willingness to participate or help.

Included Studies

Kimou (2019): Based in Côte d'Ivoire, this study evaluated the impact of an employment promotion program on youth's willingness to participate or help within their communities and contribute to peacebuilding. In the short term, participation in the program decreased trust in out-community youth by 29% and trust in colleagues by 16%. However, long-term effects were more positive, with having a paid job increasing community meeting attendance by 20%, trust in family members by 17%, and trust in colleagues by 25%. Additionally, program participation was strongly associated with pro-peace behaviors, with job-related training positively influencing peace-oriented attitudes, while entrepreneurship training had a negative effect on social cohesion. Despite its limitations, including partial outcome descriptions and no mention of power calculations, the study highlights the potential of employment programs to foster long-term engagement and cooperation, even in challenging post-conflict settings. The study is rated as medium confidence due to experimental study design, partial description of outcomes and no mention of power calculations.

Lehmann (2014): This study evaluated the UNHCR winter cash assistance program in Lebanon, which aimed to provide \$575 USD via ATM cards to 87,700 registered Syrian refugee households to help them stay warm during cold winter months. The program used a quasi-experimental design with 827 households in the treatment group and 962 in the control group. The study found that while the cash assistance was insufficient to fully meet the program's goal of ensuring beneficiaries stayed warm throughout the winter, it had positive impacts on other areas. Notably, the assistance increased access to education by reducing child labor, indicating a positive shift in community engagement and support for children's well-being. The findings suggest that cash transfers can foster willingness to participate or help, as beneficiaries were able to better support their children's education, reducing the need for child labor and increasing participation in educational opportunities. The study is rated as medium confidence due to experimental study design, partial description of outcomes and no mention of power calculations.

Blattman (2014): Blattman examines the effects of financial products, services, and cash and in-kind transfers on individuals' willingness to participate or help, particularly in the context of employment and economic engagement. The study focuses on a program in Uganda that provided cash grants to young, underemployed individuals to invest in vocational training and business assets. The findings suggest that financial constraints, especially credit limitations, play a significant role in preventing individuals from engaging in productive economic activities. When provided with financial resources, participants—especially women—showed significant increases in earnings, work hours, and investments

in skilled trades. However, despite these economic gains, the study found little evidence of increased participation in community activities, collective action, or political engagement - "First, treatment is associated with a 0.098 standard deviation increase in community participation, but the treatment effect at four years is 0". Suggesting that while financial support can alleviate economic constraints and improve employment outcomes, it does not necessarily translate into higher levels of social participation or willingness to help in communal or political contexts. The study is rated as medium confidence due to experimental study design, partial description of outcomes and interventions with no mention of power calculations.

Confidence assessment

Overall low confidence: Confidence is low because most studies are rated low, even though findings are generally consistent across the studies.

Other outcomes in this study:

Social cohesion / Feelings of trust & Acceptance of diversity
Human security / Economic security