

Effect of civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on economic security

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement initiatives, including work-for-relief programs and education under SYLI, had a **moderate effect** on economic security, while fiscal assistance primarily increased public security spending.

Geographical region: East Asia & Pacific

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.181$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies; 8 ES)

Short summary

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement initiatives had a **moderate effect** on economic security. Work-for-relief programs improved rural agricultural production, while secondary education and civic engagement reduced youth disappointment in economic opportunities. Fiscal assistance mainly increased public security spending, with limited direct economic impact, and neither intervention significantly influenced immediate revenue collection or fiscal stability. Confidence in this cell is low due to the limited number of studies

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions included fiscal assistance and work-for-relief grants under China's "8-7 National Plan" (1994–2000) in Xinjiang, and the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) in Somalia, which expanded secondary education and civic engagement. Fiscal aid increased public security and administrative spending, while work-for-relief and education boosted economic opportunities and community involvement.

How the intervention is expected to work

In Xinjiang, fiscal assistance aimed to strengthen government capacity through increased public security and administrative spending, while work-for-relief grants financed infrastructure projects to enhance rural development and agricultural productivity. In Somalia, secondary education and civic engagement under SYLI were expected to equip youth with skills for employment, foster confidence in government, and reduce support for armed groups. Civic engagement provided youth opportunities to contribute locally, promoting nonviolent approaches and economic empowerment.

The evidence base

The cell includes two primary studies. The Xinjiang study used county-level panel data (1994–2000), employing covariate balancing propensity scores and instrumental variable regression to estimate causal effects. The Somalia study used a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods design with surveys and key informant interviews, sampling 1,220 youth in South Central Somalia and Puntland.

Evidence findings

Work-for-relief grants and education had a **moderate effect** on economic security, improving rural productivity and reducing youth disappointment. Fiscal assistance increased public security spending but had limited direct impact on economic outcomes or fiscal stability.

Included studies

Cheng (2021) evaluates the impact of poverty alleviation measures in Xinjiang, China, focusing on fiscal assistance and work-for-relief grants under the "8-7 National Plan" (1994–2000). These interventions aimed to address poverty by financing infrastructure projects such as roads, power grids, and irrigation systems. Xinjiang, a peripheral region in China characterized by ethnic diversity, poverty, and political instability. The analysis uses county-level panel data from 1994 to 2000. The study employs Covariate Balance Propensity Score (CBPS) and instrumental variable regression to estimate causal effects. The dataset includes all counties in Xinjiang, focusing on government spending, agricultural production, local fiscal revenues, and incidents of ethnic violence. Fiscal assistance statistically increased per capita spending on public security (10% growth attributable to intervention) and administrative management but showed no significant immediate effect on agricultural production. Work-for-relief grants significantly increased local agricultural production, with a small positive effect on public security spending. Neither intervention had a measurable immediate impact on revenue collection. Work-for-relief grants positively influenced rural development, unlike fiscal assistance, which was less impactful. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Tesfaye (2018) evaluates the impact of the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) program in South Central Somalia and Puntland, focusing on improving access to secondary education and civic engagement to reduce youth support for political violence. The study was conducted in South Central Somalia and Puntland. A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was used, involving surveys and key informant interviews. The survey sampled 1,220 youth across various treatment groups. The study included 1,220 youth aged 15–24, split into three groups: untreated (283), education-only (215), and education plus civic engagement (722). Secondary education reduced youth disappointment in future livelihood opportunities by 48.2%, while combined interventions reduced disappointment further. This is a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

We have low confidence in the cell due to a limited number of the studies in the cell.

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Nature and scale of violence or atrocities/Social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Social cohesion/Sense of belongingness
- Human security/Physical security/Political security/Intermediate social cohesion outcome