

Effect of civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on intermediate social cohesion outcomes

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives, including civic education, participatory workshops, and secondary education, had a moderate effect on civic competence, political efficacy, and participation, and reduced youth support for political violence.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.193$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (3 studies; 9 ES)

Short summary

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement interventions increased civic competence, rights awareness, and local participation, producing moderate improvements in political efficacy and decentralization knowledge. Secondary education combined with civic engagement reduced youth support for political violence. Overall, the pooled effects of these interventions were moderate on intermediate social cohesion outcomes. Confidence is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

Programs included civic education, participatory workshops, secondary education, and civic engagement activities. They aimed to strengthen civic competence, political efficacy, democratic engagement, and social cohesion by promoting rights awareness, knowledge of governance and decentralization, non-violent norms, ethnic tolerance, and participation. Impacts were generally stronger for participation and political efficacy than for democratic values..

How the intervention is expected to work

Interventions were designed to enhance civic competence, political efficacy, and social cohesion through education, engagement, and capacity-building. Civic education and participatory workshops increased knowledge of rights, governance, and democracy, fostering informed participation. Secondary education and civic engagement targeted youth, reducing support for political violence and strengthening non-violent social norms.

The evidence base

The cell includes three primary studies using matched sampling, encouragement designs, and quasi-experimental methods.

Studies were conducted in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia, focusing on politically fragile and conflict-affected regions.

Evidence findings

Interventions moderately improved civic competence, political efficacy, and participation. Education and civic engagement reduced support for political violence, while effects on broader democratic values were limited.

Included studies

Finkel (2012) The Kenya National Civic Education Programme II (NCEP II-Uraia) was implemented from 2006 to 2007 in Kenya, a context of political polarization and ethnic tension before the 2007 general elections. The program, funded by European donors, aimed to foster nation-building, democracy, good governance, constitutionalism, and human rights. It reached 4.5–5.5 million people through workshops, theatre, religious gatherings, and media campaigns, focusing on issues such as ethnic tolerance and gender equality. The study used a survey of 3,600 participants (1,800 treatment, 1,800 control) conducted in 2008, using matched sampling to minimize selection bias. Results showed significant effects on civic competence: participants were more informed about rights (+0.15 SD), had greater internal efficacy (+0.11 SD), and improved local political participation (+0.07 SD). However, impacts on democratic values were limited. There were small increases in rights consciousness (+0.07 SD), modest rejection of vote-buying (+0.08 SD), and weak effects on support for women's rights. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to lack of pretest data and recall bias.

Finkel (2021) The VOICE program, conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2010–2011), used participatory workshops featuring "Boîtes à Images" to promote knowledge of decentralization, democracy, and political engagement. Implemented in Bandundu province, the program aimed to foster democratic demand and civic competence within a challenging political environment marked by weak institutions and stalled decentralization reforms. The study design featured an "encouragement approach," randomly inviting 800 individuals (out of 1,120 respondents) to attend workshops. Post-workshop surveys measured changes in attitudes, comparing treatment and control groups to assess causal effects. The findings revealed significant impacts on civic competence (democratic demand). Political efficacy increased by +1.42 SD, and decentralization knowledge rose by (+1.66 SD) among attendees. This study is considered low confidence quantitative study.

Tesfaye (2018) The Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI), conducted in South Central Somalia and Puntland, aimed to reduce youth support for political violence through secondary education and civic engagement interventions. This initiative addressed a critical context of armed conflict, weak governance, and youth vulnerability to recruitment by extremist groups like Al-Shabaab. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, surveying 1,220 youth across treatment and control groups. Treatment groups were further divided into those accessing SYLI-supported secondary education alone and those combining education with civic engagement opportunities. Key mediators such as belief in the ability to effect change and confidence in nonviolence were measured. Findings revealed that secondary education alone decreased youth support for political violence by 48.2% and raised confidence in non-violence (+0.15 SD). When paired with civic engagement opportunities, support for violence dropped by 64.8%, and belief in the ability to effect change increased. Confidence in non-violent means (+0.12 SD) was significantly bolstered through the combined intervention. However, social isolation and perceptions of governance remained largely unchanged, suggesting contextual limitations. This is a high and medium confidence quantitative Study.

Confidence assessment

The cell has low confidence due to a limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in the study/cell

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity/Sense of belongingness
- Community and state governance/Govt. performance/Civic participation
- Human security/Economic security/Political security