

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on sense of belongingness

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa had a small effect on youth's sense of belonging, with clan-based divisions persisting.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.062$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (1 study; 2 ES)

Short summary

Civic engagement and education initiatives (Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI)) aimed at reducing youth support for political violence showed a small effect on enhancing social inclusion. However, youth continued to experience social isolation ($p>0.1$) due to entrenched clan-based divisions. These findings highlight that while such programs can reduce support for violence, addressing systemic social exclusion remains essential for long-term stability. Confidence in these findings is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

Programs combined access to secondary education, civic engagement activities, leadership training, and youth-led service projects to strengthen participation and nonviolent conflict resolution skills.

How the intervention is expected to work

By improving education access and fostering civic engagement, these initiatives aim to enhance knowledge, leadership capacity, and optimism about future opportunities. Participatory activities are expected to reduce youth isolation, build trust in community and government structures, and discourage support for violence.

The evidence base

The cell includes one primary study employing a quasi-experimental design conducted in Puntland and South-Central Somalia.

Evidence findings

Civic engagement and education programs had a small effect on youth's sense of belonging, with clan-based social divisions persisting and limiting meaningful inclusion.

Included studies

Tesfaye (2018) The Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) aimed to reduce youth support for political violence through increased access to secondary education and civic engagement. Conducted in

Puntland and South-Central Somalia, the study used a quasi-experimental design, surveying 1,220 youth aged 15-24, including in-school and out-of-school participants across eight locations. Contrary to expectations, neither the provision of secondary education nor the addition of civic engagement opportunities significantly impacted youth-reported levels of social isolation. Survey results suggest that the interventions did not sufficiently strengthen community ties or address feelings of social alienation. This is notable, given prior research indicating that a sense of belonging and collective identity are critical in preventing youth from joining extremist groups like Al-Shabaab. Regression models showed no significant mediating effect of reduced social isolation on support for political violence ($p>0.1$). Interviews also highlighted that deep-rooted clan-based favouritism and societal divisions remained key barriers to fostering inclusivity among Somali youth. While the SYLI interventions effectively reduced support for violence through other pathways, addressing systemic drivers of social isolation remains essential for long-term stability. This is a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

This cell confidence is low due to the limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in the study/cell

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Human security/Economic security/Political security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes