

Effect of Dispute resolution on Nature & scale of violence or atrocity

PEACE and Community Empowerment improved local dispute resolution but had little effect on broader violence. While disputes declined, inter-tribal violence persisted, youth-elder conflicts rose, and armed incursions increased in some areas.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Small effect ($g = 0.03$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies with 25 effect size)

Short Summary

Dispute resolution interventions, including the PEACE and Community Empowerment programs, used participatory approaches like mediation, workshops, and infrastructure projects. A rigorous evaluation in Liberia (RCT with 10,000+ individuals) showed reduced unresolved disputes but no decline in inter-tribal violence, while youth-elder disputes increased. In Niger, a quasi-experimental study (40 villages, 1,843 respondents) showed no significant impact on violence, with some areas experiencing more armed incursions. Overall, both programs improved local dispute resolution but had limited effects on broader violence, with studies rated as low-confidence quantitative research.

Long summary

The intervention

The Community Empowerment Program in Liberia conducted eight-day workshops over two months, focusing on dispute resolution, problem-solving, and reducing court reliance through lectures, group discussions, and participatory dramas. Similarly, the PEACE program in Niger employed the CATALYSE approach, promoting community-driven initiatives like mediation, infrastructure development, equitable resource management, and economic programs.

How is the intervention expected to work

The Community Empowerment Program is expected to reduce violence by teaching community members constructive dispute-resolution skills and promoting local solutions instead of relying on formal judicial systems. By embedding facilitators in communities, it sought to build trust and encourage peaceful problem-solving. Similarly, the PEACE program focused on reducing vulnerability to violent extremism through collaborative activities to address conflict drivers.

The evidence base

This cell comprises three studies; two low-confidence primary studies and one systematic review with high to medium confidence. The primary studies, conducted in Liberia and Niger, utilized a randomized controlled trial (RCT) and a quasi-experimental design. The systematic review included research spanning Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

Evidence findings

Dispute resolution interventions such as PEACE and Community Empowerment have enhanced local dispute resolution mechanisms; however, their influence on broader violence was found to be limited. While the number of unresolved disputes declined significantly, inter-tribal violence remained static.

The review Evidence

The systematic review examined 149 studies on interventions covering themes like peace mechanisms, mediation, economic programs, governance, security, justice, and media interventions. Findings showed mixed effectiveness, such as peace mechanisms had some success, while militarised policing often escalated violence. and some peace operations had unintended adverse effects.

Included studies: The cell includes two low-confidence primary studies. The detailed summary thus provided below,

Blattman (2012): The study evaluated the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) campaign, known as the "Community Empowerment Program" in rural Liberia, designed to strengthen informal dispute resolution by training community members. The program included eight-day workshops over two months, focusing on direct dispute engagement, problem-solving, positive-sum resolutions, and reducing reliance on formal courts. Training, led by two facilitators for groups of 35, included lectures, group discussions, participatory dramas, and experience-sharing. Facilitators lived in the communities for 2-4 months, building trust and reinforcing workshop principles—the training aimed to address violence by encouraging constructive dispute resolution and discouraging forum shopping.

The evaluation used a randomized controlled trial (RCT) combined with qualitative research, surveying over 10,000 individuals across 243 communities, with 85 receiving the intervention. Conflict-prone communities were nominated by local officials, and leaders mobilized residents to participate. The intervention showed no reduction in land conflict levels, but treated communities reported higher resolution rates, more frequent use of informal mechanisms, and greater satisfaction with outcomes, particularly for long standing disputes. While land dispute incidence remained unchanged (22% in both treatment and control), unresolved disputes decreased by 28%, and resolution satisfaction increased by 12%. Informal forums saw a 22% rise in usage. Money and business disputes saw non-significant increases in incidence (15%) and satisfaction (9%). Inter-tribal violence and violent protests decreased (35% and 50%, respectively, but not significantly). Youth-elder disputes rose by 70%, reflecting a shift in youth asserting their rights. The study is rated low confidence quantitative study.

Lichtenfeld (2022)-The study evaluates the PEACE (Preventing Violent Extremism Actions through Increased Social Cohesion Efforts) program, which aims to reduce the vulnerability to violent extremism by enhancing social cohesion in the Tillabéri region of Niger. The intervention employed Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach, a methodology focused on community mobilization and participatory planning. This approach engaged communities in identifying and addressing shared needs to promote trust and cooperation among different groups. The main activities included in the PEACE program are: 1) Mediation and dialogue initiatives to foster conflict resolution skills and promote peaceful interaction. 2) Infrastructure projects that involved the collaborative development or rehabilitation of community assets. 3) Access to shared natural resources initiatives to manage and equitably distribute resources like water and land. 4) Livelihoods and economic inclusion efforts designed to enhance economic opportunities for youth and women. 5) Cultural and sporting events aimed at bringing communities together through shared cultural expressions and recreational activities. The study used a quasi-experimental design involving 40 villages, randomly assigned into treatment (20 villages) and control (20 villages) groups in the program's first phase. Data collection occurred at three points—baseline in 2020, midline in 2021, and endline in 2021—yielding insights from 1,843 respondents (55% male, 45% female). The PEACE program did not significantly reduce the frequency or scale of violent incidents, as measured by data on battles, attacks on civilians, and other violent events in villages that participated in the PEACE program compared to those that did not. Some villages, including those involved in PEACE, experienced increased armed group incursions during the program's implementation period. This trend reflects worsening security dynamics in the Tillabéri region. These findings highlight the limited direct impact of the PEACE program on violent events, underscoring that its

interventions were more focused on addressing community-level grievances rather than external security threats or broader armed group activity. The study is rated as a low-confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

Overall, the cell is rated as low confidence due to the limited number of studies, all of which are also classified as low-confidence quantitative studies.

Link to review summaries

Cramer Christophe (2016).

The study may be accessed via EGM.

Other outcomes assessed in the study

Violence and atrocity prevention/Nature and scale of violence or atrocities

Human security/Economic Security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes

Social cohesion/acceptance of diversity

Community & state governance/Civic participation/Government performance