

Effect of Dispute Resolution on Physical Security

Community-based dispute resolution programs in Nigeria produced a large improvement in physical security ($g = 0.288$) in conflict-affected regions.

Geographical Region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect: Large effect ($g=0.288$)

Confidence in study findings: low (2 studies with 7 effect sizes)

Short summary

Dispute resolution interventions including CONCUR, IPNN, and ECPN—were evaluated for their impact on conflict mitigation and physical security in Nigeria. Mixed-method evaluations, including difference-in-differences analysis and randomized trials, surveyed thousands of households in conflict-affected areas. Results showed improvements in security and mobility: freedom of movement increased from 0% to 72% in CONCUR communities, 62% in IPNN sites, and ECPN communities reported a 15% higher perception of security than control areas. The interventions were associated with reduced tensions and increased safety for families and children.

Long summary

The intervention

The CONCUR, IPNN, and ECPN programs aimed to reduce community tensions and improve security through interest-based negotiation (IBN) training and collaborative peacebuilding activities. They included mediation and dialogue to resolve local disputes, creation of shared resources such as grazing areas and community gardens, leadership and negotiation training for local actors, and advocacy campaigns to promote peaceful coexistence. These activities were designed to strengthen intergroup cooperation, build trust, and address economic and social drivers of conflict within communities.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions are expected to empower community leaders and residents to mediate conflicts peacefully by equipping them with negotiation and problem-solving skills. IBN training encouraged impartial dialogue, reduced tensions, and prevented escalation. Joint economic and resource-sharing projects fostered cooperation between groups, built mutual trust, and addressed underlying economic drivers of conflict—ultimately enhancing stability and security.

The evidence base

The evidence includes **five studies**: two impact evaluations (using quasi-experimental and randomized designs), two low-confidence qualitative studies (Demartoto Argyo & Dhialulhaq Ahmad, 2014), and one systematic review with medium-to-high confidence.

Evidence findings:

Dispute resolution programs CONCUR, IPNN, and ECPN enhanced physical security and freedom of movement in conflict-affected Nigerian communities and improved perceptions of safety. However, the overall confidence in these findings is low, reflecting the limited number of studies and effect sizes currently available..

Review Findings

The review analyzed studies from fragile and conflict-affected regions, including Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and Asia, excluding Latin America. It focused on low- and middle-income countries with intergroup tensions. Interventions included peace education, intergroup dialogues, collaborative programs, media campaigns, and economic support. Findings showed small positive effects on perceived security and community safety.

Included studies: There are two impact evaluations under this cell. The detailed summaries are thus provided here:

Baran (2017) evaluated Mercy Corps' Community-Based Conflict Management and Cooperative Use of Resources (CONCUR) program (2012–2016) in Nigeria's Middle Belt. The program aimed to mitigate farmer-pastoralist conflicts through Interest-Based Negotiation (IBN) training, joint economic projects (e.g., shared grazing areas, marketplaces), and policy advocacy. A mixed-methods impact evaluation utilized difference-in-difference (DiD) analysis, comparing baseline and endline surveys across conflict-affected communities in Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau states. The study sampled 1,806 households at baseline and 1,276 at endline, employing random selection through community mapping. Qualitative insights were drawn from focus groups and key informant interviews.

Findings on physical security demonstrated substantial improvements. The proportion of respondents reporting complete freedom of movement increased from 0% at baseline to 72% at endline, reflecting a 44-percentage point improvement relative to comparison sites ($p < 0.01$). Enhanced security also facilitated greater mobility for children and families, improving access to schools. Additionally, 79% of respondents in CONCUR communities reported reduced tensions between conflict groups at endline, compared to 45% at baseline. The study is rated as a high-medium confidence assessment.

Dawop (2019): The study evaluated the Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria (ECPN) program, which planned to reduce farmer-pastoralist conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt. It involved training community leaders in mediation, forming joint committees, implementing community projects (e.g., boreholes, fences), and hosting conflict prevention forums. A mixed-method approach was used, combining a community-level RCT with individual pre/post-intervention analysis. Data was collected from 30 communities (15 sites), with 1,539 baseline and 1,523 endline surveys, plus 287 resurveyed individuals (direct, indirect, and control participants). Communities with prior violence were targeted, and household selection used a listing exercise. Data collection included surveys (2015, 2018), behavioral games, and observational monitoring. Analysis employed regression, difference-in-difference comparisons, and qualitative market/social observations.

Findings on physical security revealed that the ECPN program successfully improved perceptions of security in intervention communities. By the end of the program, perceptions of security in intervention communities had increased significantly compared to control communities, with a 15% difference in change (effect size = 0.84, $p = 0.01$). Initially, intervention communities felt less secure, but they ended up feeling more secure than control communities. At the individual level, direct and indirect participants in intervention communities reported greater increases in security perceptions than control participants, though there was no significant difference between direct and indirect participants. The effect size at the individual level was 0.12, indicating a 3% difference between groups ($p = 0.10$). The pattern suggests that peace committees may have made participants more aware of security incidents, especially in Benue, where pastoralist direct participants reported a decrease in security perceptions. The study is reported as a low-confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

Overall, the studies are rated with low confidence in their findings due to small numbers of studies included under this category.

Link to review summaries

Spangaro Jo (2013).

All studies may be accessed via the EGM.

Other outcomes assessed in these studies:

Human security/economic security/physical security

Violence & atrocity prevention/Diplomatic relation & peaceful dispute resolution

Social cohesion/feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity