

Effect of intergroup contact and peace education on diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolutions

Intergroup contact and peace education interventions show a large effect on improving diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Large effect ($g=0.203$)

Confidence in the study findings: Low confidence (3 studies; 24 ES)

Short summary

Intergroup contact and peace education interventions had a large effect on diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution. Participants reported increased use of non-violent conflict resolution, improved land dispute management, and fewer violent disputes. While these interventions show short-term improvements, long-term impacts on community peace remain uncertain. Confidence in this cell is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions aimed to enhance civic education, human rights awareness, and conflict resolution skills in conflict-prone communities. Programs included training workshops on negotiation, mediation, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) techniques, often reinforced through follow-up activities over several months. While the interventions reduced violent conflicts, their impact on social norms and attitudinal changes was mixed, with occasional increases in youth-elder conflicts and interpersonal tensions.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions work by providing structured education and skills-building in conflict resolution. Workshops on mediation, negotiation, and ADR techniques equip community members to resolve disputes informally, reducing reliance on formal legal systems. By encouraging dialogue and mutual understanding, the programs aim to foster peaceful dispute management and strengthen local capacities for non-violent conflict resolution.

The evidence base

The cell includes 3 impact evaluations and 1 systematic review. There is a low degree of consistency in the review findings. The review is concerned with interventions including intergroup contact and peace education for dispute resolution. The cell also includes a qualitative study by McMahon (2009) from Ethiopia.

The three studies employ randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The studies are conducted in Liberia, West Africa.

Evidence findings

The interventions led to reductions in violence, land disputes, and harmful practices. However, some studies also reported unintended increases in social tensions and conflicts between youth

and elders. Overall, the findings indicate large positive effects on dispute resolution, but results are mixed across contexts.

The review evidence

The review indicates that current studies provide limited attention to the resources and capacities that support community engagement in conflict mitigation.

The impact evaluation evidence

Blattman (2011) evaluates Liberia's Community Empowerment Program (CEP), a large-scale peace-building initiative promoting civic education, human rights, and non-violent dispute resolution. Using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) across 67 treated and 170 control communities, the study assessed the impact on diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution. Findings indicate higher rates of non-violent conflict resolution, increased land conflict reporting but improved resolution, and moderate shifts toward human rights and equity. Results show that land conflicts increased in early-treated communities but decreased in recently treated ones, indicating a delayed effect of the program. Violent land conflicts were lower in treated communities, and conflict resolution rates were higher, with more reported satisfaction in communities that underwent training. However, trainees and general community members experienced the program differently, as trainees reported lower levels of land conflict, while community members initially reported higher levels before resolution increased. While the program reduced violent disputes, it also surfaced latent conflicts, emphasizing the complexities of peace education interventions. Ultimately, the study highlights the potential and risks of such programs, showing their ability to shift conflict resolution norms but also their need for sustained engagement to ensure long-term peace. The study rated as low confidence due to the lack of reporting of attrition.

Blattman (2014) assesses the impact of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) education program in 86 Liberian communities, implemented by UNHCR and the Justice and Peace Commission, training 15% of adults in negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution through eight-day workshops over two months, with facilitators reinforcing ADR norms for up to four months. The intervention led to a 29% reduction in unresolved land disputes, a 32% decrease in property destruction, and a 10% increase in satisfaction with dispute outcomes, with 17% more disputes resolved informally. While residents were 22% less likely to take minor disputes to courts, there was no major shift in dispute resolution norms or egalitarian attitudes, though acceptance of ethnic intermarriage increased slightly. However, money or business disputes increased slightly (15%) without significant improvements in resolution, and physical fights rose by 32%. Overall, the ADR intervention effectively reduced land disputes and encouraged informal resolution, but had limited impact on broader attitudinal change and may have contributed to an increase in interpersonal conflicts. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Hartman (2018) The intervention, known as the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) peace education program, was implemented in Liberia and involved training community members in negotiation and mediation techniques to resolve disputes. The study followed an experimental design with a sample of 246 communities, randomly assigning 116 to receive treatment. The total sample included 5,435 individuals at the 1-year endline and 4,011 at the 3-year endline, with additional subsamples for specific dispute-related analyses. The impact of intergroup contact and peace education was observed through reductions in unresolved disputes by 28% at the 1-year mark, and a 41% decrease in threats, property destruction, or interpersonal violence at 3 years.

Results show that unresolved disputes decreased from 0.07 to 0.024 (a 28% reduction), while disputes involving threats, property destruction, or violence dropped by 28.4% in 3 years. Other results highlight a 20.7% reduction in disputes involving violence and a 40.5% decrease in property destruction at 3 years. This study is rated as a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The cell's confidence is low due to the limited number of studies.

Link to review summaries

Ditlmann (2017)

Other outcomes in this study

- Violence and atrocity prevention / Nature and scale of violence or atrocities
- Human security / Economic security / Intermediate social cohesion outcomes
- Community and state governance/Government performance
- Social Cohesion / Willingness to help