

Effect of Intergroup contact & Peace education on Presence and Quality of Social Safety Nets

Headline finding: Intergroup contact and peace education interventions in fragile contexts enhanced social cohesion and by the creation of safety nets.

Geographical distribution: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect: Positive (evidence suggests asset building and skill training in women helped establish social cohesion and creation of informal safety nets.)

Confidence in study findings: High and medium confidence

Short Summary

Intergroup contact and peace education intervention were aimed at reducing gender disparity in fragile and conflict affected settings (FCAS) in the context of promoting positive group interaction and challenging harmful gender norms. These interventions involved improving women's access to justice, rights, and services as well as enhancing social cohesion in communities. Consequently, the quality and availability of social protection services, including health care, legal aid, and social protection, were expected to improve and benefit marginalized groups, especially women and girls. The effectiveness of these interventions was moderate to high, although success depended on local context and the need to target restrictive gender norms to maximize impact.

Long summary

The intervention

Intergroup contact and peace education were devised to create positive interactions and mutual understanding between diverse groups, especially addressing gender-based disparities in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS). Through these interventions, the presence and quality of social safety nets were expected to primarily enhance social cohesion and collective community responsibility. As intergroup tensions reduced, communities became more inclusive, allowing for more equitable distribution of resources and services. Women, in particular, benefitted from the better access to public services, such as health services, justice systems, and educational opportunities. Therefore, peace education helped create a shared mindset that valued gender equality and social protection, leading communities to establish both formal and informal safety nets, especially for vulnerable women and girls.

How the intervention is expected to work

Intergroup contact and peace education worked by reducing tensions between different social groups, creating empathy, and challenging damaging gender stereotypes. In FCAS, the marginalization of women was compounded by both conflict and deeply ingrained gender norms. The intervention worked on altering these norms through education and positive intergroup interactions, eventually leading to greater social cohesion. As a result, social safety nets such as legal support, healthcare, and social protection were improved.

The evidence base

The summary cell consists of one systematic review with 104 impact evaluations (75% randomised controlled trials) assessing the effects of 14 different types of interventions in FCAS. About 28% of included studies were assessed as having a high risk of bias (45% among quasi experimental designs). Interventions supporting women's empowerment and gender equality in FCAS produced positive effects on the outcomes related to the primary focus of the intervention.

The review evidence

The review drew evidence on 104 impact evaluations and found that most interventions had positive effects on women's empowerment and gender equality, though behavioral changes showed smaller impacts. Though the review mentioned significant effect sizes, effect sizes pertaining to intergroup contact & Peace education on Access to justice, rights and public services was not explicitly mentioned in the review, and therefore the data was narratively synthesized. Unconditional financial transfers, especially when paired with education or training, improved women's economic autonomy and negotiation skills. Community discussions and media campaigns helped shift gender norms, while combining financial support with services like education, mental health, and violence prevention enhanced access to public services. Self-help groups (SHGs) improved access to resources and services. Some studies showed that asset-building and skills training reduced risks such as sexual violence. Studies like the COMPASS program in the DRC, (Tanner & O'Connor, 2017a, 2017b) and the What Works to Prevent Violence program in Afghanistan (Gibbs et al., 2018) highlighted the importance of peer-to-peer mentorship and collective learning. These programs created trusted group settings that fostered long-term peer networks, social cohesion, and mutual support thereby creating informal social safety nets. In Afghanistan, for example, women noted that the program provided rare opportunities to form friendships and networks outside their families, which they described as a "good change" and crucial to their improved well-being. Additionally, mentoring was shown to play a central role in encouraging ongoing participation and relationship-building, with mentors and mentees both gaining confidence and forming trusted bonds. However, restrictive gender norms limited intervention effectiveness. Success was supported by engaging local institutions. The review also noted challenges, including lack of long-term data and limited evidence of actual behavior change.

Confidence Assessment:

High and medium confidence

Source:Lwamba (2022)