

Effect of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on access to justice, rights and public services

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had a **large effect** on access to justice, rights, and public services, notably improving education, water, and electricity access but showing limited governance and women's empowerment outcomes.

Geographical space: South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, Europe & Central Asia

Effect size: Large effect ($g=0.28$)

Confidence in study findings: Moderate confidence (6 studies; 30 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had large effects on access to justice, rights, and public services. Notable improvements were observed in education, water, and electricity access, while effects on governance transparency, women's empowerment, and service utilization were modest or inconsistent. Infrastructure gains were significant in some sectors, but institutional and gender inclusion outcomes remained limited. Confidence in the cell is moderate due to some studies having low confidence and inconsistency in the effect sizes.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions focused on improving governance, public services, and rights protection through social funds, community-driven development (CDD), and reconstruction programs. These initiatives provided block grants for locally prioritized projects, created village development committees, and promoted participatory governance. They invested in education, health, water, electricity, and justice services, with some programs incorporating gender-inclusive structures and decentralized decision-making mechanisms to enhance institutional capacity and accountability.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions are designed to enhance access to public services and justice by decentralizing decision-making and empowering communities to manage resources. Through block grants and participatory governance structures, communities identify and implement projects that improve education, health, water, and electricity access. Strengthening local institutions such as village development committees aims to promote transparency, accountability, and rights protection. By involving women and marginalized groups, the programs seek to increase inclusion and equity in service delivery and governance outcomes..

The evidence base

The cell includes six impact evaluations and three systematic reviews, with a moderate to high degree of consistency in findings. Three studies used randomized controlled trials (RCTs), while three relied on quasi-experimental matching techniques. Studies were conducted in Afghanistan (Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, Nangarhar), Sierra Leone (Bombali, Bonthe), Armenia (Aragatsotn, Lori, Shirak, Sunik, Tavush, Yerevan), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (South Kivu, Haut Katanga, Tanganyika, North Kivu, Maniema).

Evidence findings

Social funds and CDD interventions had large effects on access to justice, rights, and public services by improving education, water, and electricity infrastructure. However, gains in governance transparency, women's empowerment, and service utilization particularly in health and irrigation were limited or unsustainable. The magnitude of effects varied depending on institutional stability and community engagement.

The review evidence

Systematic reviews indicate that social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs substantially improved local infrastructure and service access, particularly in education, water, and electricity. However, governance outcomes and gender empowerment effects remained weak, highlighting the need for stronger institutional integration and long-term accountability mechanisms.

The impact evaluation evidence

Beath (2015) evaluates the impact of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a large-scale rural development initiative aimed at improving local governance and economic well-being through community-driven projects. The NSP facilitates the creation of gender-balanced Community Development Councils (CDCs), providing block grants for local projects. The study covers 500 villages across 10 districts in Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces. The evaluation uses a randomized controlled trial (RCT) approach, with 250 villages receiving NSP (treatment group) and 250 villages not receiving it (control group). Data was collected through baseline, midline, and endline surveys from 2007 to 2011, comprising over 25,000 household interviews and more than 2,600 focus groups. The sample includes 500 villages with household surveys and focus groups of village leaders and women. The data is derived from both male and female respondents. The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) in Afghanistan significantly improved access to clean drinking water, increasing usage of protected sources by 15% at endline, and reduced water collection time by 5%. Electricity access rose by 26% due to NSP-funded projects ($p < 0.05$). Girls' school attendance improved ($p < 0.035$), and child doctor and prenatal visits increased ($p < 0.013$). Women's access to counselling services more than doubled ($p < 0.001$). However, irrigation projects had no impact ($p = 0.696$), and village transportation improvements were not sustained ($p = 0.669$). The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Casey (2013) The GoBifo Project, implemented in Sierra Leone, aimed to foster inclusive decision-making, strengthen local institutions, and provide untied block grants for community development. A core goal was to shift political and social attitudes towards greater inclusivity and democratic participation. Location of the study was Sierra Leone, specifically targeting rural communities across Bombali and Bonthe districts. A randomized controlled trial (RCT) assigned 236 villages to treatment or control groups. The project involved community facilitation, development planning, and project implementation over four years (2005–2009). Impact was assessed through household surveys, focus groups, and structured community activities. The study surveyed 2,832 households in 236 villages. The GoBifo Project in Sierra Leone significantly improved functional local institutions, increasing the presence of village development committees (VDCs) and bank accounts ($p < 0.01$). Quality and quantity of public services infrastructure improved, with a 16.4% increase in functional local public goods ($p < 0.01$). However, access to information about local governance saw no significant improvement ($p = 0.39$), indicating limited spillover effects on broader governance engagement. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Chase (2002) The Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF) aimed to support communities in rehabilitating local infrastructure, particularly schools and water systems, during Armenia's transition from a centrally planned economy. ASIF provided financing for community-driven projects to improve education, water access, and social services. The study was conducted in Armenia, targeting

earthquake-affected regions (Aragatsotn, Lori, Shirak), conflict-affected regions (Sunik, Tavush), and urban areas (Yerevan). The study used propensity score matching and pipeline matching techniques to control for selection bias. The evaluation compared households in communities with completed ASIF projects to those in communities with approved but incomplete projects. The study was based on a nationally representative household survey (3,600 households). An oversample of 2,260 households from ASIF-active areas was included. The total sample included 113 clusters where ASIF was active. In Armenia's Social Investment Fund (ASIF), 8% of households in treatment communities reported school service improvements in the past 12 months, compared to 6% in matched comparison groups ($p < 0.05$) but lower than 12% in pipeline communities ($p < 0.1$). For water services, 34% of treatment households reported improvements, significantly higher than 22% in matched groups ($p < 0.01$) and 28% in pipeline groups ($p < 0.1$). The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to selection bias and a small sample size in subgroup analysis.

Humphreys (2014) The Tuungane program in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) aimed to enhance participatory governance by providing communities with funds for local projects and encouraging democratic decision-making. The study was conducted in villages across the eastern DRC. A randomized controlled trial (RCT) was used. Communities were randomly assigned to participate in the Tuungane program or serve as controls. A follow-up intervention, RAPID, tested transparency and accountability effects. The study involved 560 villages. The rate of accessing services per month showed no significant impact from Tuungane, with mean usage ranging from 14.92 for wells to 0.24 for government services. A negative effect was observed for roads ($p = 0.054$). The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Laudati (2018) The Tuungane 1 program (2007-2011) aimed to improve education infrastructure and service provision in rural areas by funding school construction and supplies. However, it did not directly target teaching quality, affordability, or governance. The study was conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A randomized controlled trial (RCT) was used to measure the impact of the intervention on educational outcomes. Data was collected from household surveys and direct testing of children's educational performance. The study included randomly selected households from control and treatment areas. A subset of children aged 6–11 was tested in mathematics, French, and science. The total sample size for education-related measures was 3,054 children. The presence of health providers was similar across treatment and control areas, with 70% of health facilities visited by enumerators and 53% of village chiefs reporting a health provider in control areas. In 2012, 34% of village chiefs confirmed health clinic presence. Education services were more accessible, with 82% of chiefs reporting school presence, and 64% confirming this in 2012. Service costs were high, with health fees averaging \$10.59, and school fees at \$2.14 per child monthly. No significant difference in service presence or utilization was found across treatment and control areas ($p < 0.05$). The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Laudati (2018) The Tuungane 2 program (2011–2014) was a Community-Driven Development (CDD) initiative implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The program aimed to improve local governance, service delivery, and infrastructure, particularly in education and health sectors. Communities elected Village Development Committees (VDCs) to oversee funded infrastructure projects (e.g., school and health facility construction) while promoting participatory decision-making. The study was conducted in South Kivu, Haut Katanga, and Tanganyika provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The evaluation used a non-randomized, quasi-experimental design, employing propensity score matching to compare Tuungane communities with similar non-Tuungane communities. 781 villages surveyed. The Tuungane 2 program showed mixed results on women's empowerment. Women's rights awareness remained unchanged ($p = 0.48$). Women's association membership increased by 6.4% ($p < 0.05$), but participation in local development committees remained low ($p = 0.38$). Girls' school attendance increased marginally (1.2%, $p = 0.09$), but 27% of women never attended school ($p < 0.01$). Female representation in local development committees showed no significant change ($p = 0.41$). The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell is moderate due to the several low-confidence studies and inconsistencies in effect sizes.

Link to review summaries

White (2018)

Wong (2012)

Lwamba (2022)

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/ Nature and scale of violence and atrocities/Diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution/
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity/willingness to participate or help
- Community and state governance/Government performance/Civic participation
- Human security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes/food security and nutrition and health security/Educational security/Physical Security/ Political security/Economical security