

Effects of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on civic participation

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had a **moderate effect** on civic participation, increasing governance participation, women's inclusion, and electoral engagement, though effects were not sustained over time.

Geographical space: South Asia, Latin America & Caribbean, Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.171$)

Confidence in study findings: Moderate confidence (7 studies; 28 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs moderately increased civic participation by enhancing governance engagement, women's inclusion, and electoral activity. However, improvements were often short-lived, with limited long-term institutional change and persistent dissatisfaction with governance quality. Confidence in this cell is moderate due to inconsistencies in effect sizes across studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions included social funds, community-driven development (CDD), and reconstruction programs designed to strengthen civic participation, governance, and service delivery. These initiatives established elected councils, provided block grants, supported infrastructure, and promoted participatory decision-making, often incorporating gender inclusion, local elections, and civic training components.

How the intervention is expected to work

These programs aim to foster civic participation by promoting inclusive governance, local ownership, and accountability. Through block grants and elected councils, communities are empowered to manage development priorities, which can increase engagement, trust, and democratic norms. Training and awareness activities support women's participation and collective decision-making, while transparent resource management is expected to enhance citizen confidence and sustain civic involvement.

The evidence base

The cell includes seven impact evaluations and two systematic reviews, with low to moderate consistency in the findings. The studies used randomized controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental methods, and difference-in-differences designs, employing household surveys, focus groups, and community activities. Research was conducted in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Evidence findings

Social funds and CDD interventions moderately improved civic participation through increased governance engagement, women's involvement, and election participation. However, these gains

were often temporary, with weak institutionalization and persistent elite capture limiting sustained civic activity.

The review evidence

Systematic reviews indicate that social funds and CDD programs tend to strengthen local participation and social cohesion in fragile contexts. Nonetheless, restrictive social norms and limited institutional integration constrained long-term empowerment and durable civic engagement.

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. NSP significantly increased participation in local governance ($p=0.001$, endline = 8.2%) but had no durable effect on governance quality (-1.6%, $p=0.245$). Acceptance of democratic norms improved (5-7% increase in preference for secret-ballot elections, $p<0.01$). Electoral participation increased (male +3.5%, female +6%, $p<0.01$). Weak evidence of increased acceptance of central government (+2.8%, $p=0.093$) and short-term increase in government linkages (+20.1%, $p<0.01$). Gender outcomes improved in terms of female governance participation +7.9% ($p<0.01$). The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Brune (2009) evaluates a management and leadership (M&L) training program designed to increase social capital in post-conflict Nicaraguan communities. The intervention aimed to foster civic engagement, trust, and participation in governance while also assessing its impact on health behaviours, particularly child healthcare practices. The study was conducted in three Nicaraguan communities: Pantasma, Waslala (treatment), and Cinco Pinos (control). A two-year quasi-experimental design was employed, with baseline and follow-up household surveys assessing changes in social capital and health behaviors. The study used logistic regression models to measure associations between social capital and individual/community health practices. The study included a baseline sample of 198 households and a follow-up sample of 210 households. Participation in demonstrations increased significantly in communities receiving interventions, rising by 14% ($p=0.006$). The odds of participating in a demonstration were 2.33 times higher ($p=0.071$) after interventions, indicating a substantial but marginally significant increase in civic activism. 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 study found that collective action and contributions to local public goods did not significantly improve, with only 7 out of 59 outcomes meeting statistical significance ($p<0.05$). Inclusion and participation in community decisions, especially for vulnerable groups, showed no evidence of

sustained impact, as participation by women and youth in decision-making remained unchanged ($p=0.031$). Participation in local governance declined at endline ($p=0.001$), with dissatisfaction rising among villagers. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Finkel (2018) The Peace through Development II (PDEV II) program, funded by USAID, aimed to counter violent extremism in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger from 2011 to 2016. The program sought to improve social cohesion, increase resilience to extremist ideologies, and promote civic engagement. It included interventions such as vocational training, media campaigns, and community-led initiatives to address underlying causes of extremism. PDEV II was implemented in 45 “core zones” (which received all program interventions) and 56 “non-core zones” (which received only radio-based interventions). The impact evaluation used a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences approach to assess the program’s effects by comparing core and non-core zones. Surveys were conducted with 7,888 respondents across 83 zones. Social inclusiveness, measured by community involvement in decision-making, declined in all three countries, with statistically significant decreases in Burkina Faso ($p<0.01$). However, PDEV II programming mitigated this decline in core zones, where young people were actively engaged in consultations. Civic outlook improved, with increased interest in community affairs in Chad ($p<0.01$) and Niger ($p<0.01$), while Burkina Faso showed smaller, non-significant changes. 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. Community participation in health service provision showed no significant improvement, with participation levels unchanged across treatment and control areas ($p=0.467$). Similarly, participation in education service provision remained stable, with no statistically significant increase ($p=0.512$) despite program interventions aimed at fostering engagement. 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 significantly impacted community governance participation. In control areas, 42% of respondents attended a village meeting, 39% spoke, and 1.25 voluntary projects were completed per household. Tuungane areas saw a 16% increase in voluntary contributions ($p<0.05$), 9% more election participation ($p<0.01$), and unchanged voting rates (93%). Chiefs’ engagement decreased slightly (-0.2 , $p>0.1$). This study is a low confidence quantitative study.

Lichtenheld (2022) The study evaluates the PEACE (Preventing Extremism through Action and Community Engagement) program, which aimed to enhance social cohesion and reduce support for violence in Niger’s Tillabéri region. The intervention employed community-driven development (CDD) strategies, mediation and dialogue sessions, shared infrastructure projects, livelihoods support, and cultural/sports activities to improve intergroup relations and reduce vulnerability to violent extremism. The study used a quasi-experimental approach, with a difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis comparing communities with different levels of exposure to PEACE activities. It incorporated direct survey questions and indirect survey experiments (list experiments and endorsement experiments) to

measure support for violence while minimizing social desirability bias. The study focused on 40 villages and the final sample size for endline survey experiments (measuring support for violence) was 589 respondents. Participants included men, women, and youth across different ethnic and livelihood groups. The PEACE program did not significantly improve perceptions of youth or women in community decision-making. Women, despite making up nearly 60% of participants, only comprised 30% of leadership committees. The study is considered low confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence level of the cell is moderate due to the inconsistency in the effects sizes.

Link to review summaries

King (2010)

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/Sense of belonging/Feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity/willingness to participate or help
- Community and state governance/Government performance/ Access to rights, justice and public services
- Human security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes/food security and nutrition and health security/Educational security/Physical Security/ Political security/Economical security