

Social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on diplomatic relations & peaceful dispute resolution

Social funds and community-driven development programs, such as Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme (NSP), had no effect on improving diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution. The intervention initially increased local disputes and reduced resolution rates due to competition over block grants, though these effects faded over time.

Geographical region: South Asia

Effect size: No effect (g=0.004)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (1 study; 2 ES)

Short summary

Evidence from Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme (NSP) shows that while community development initiatives fostered local participation, they had no significant effect on improving dispute resolution or local diplomacy. Early increases in conflict and reduced resolution rates were linked to block grant competition, though these effects diminished post-implementation. Women's participation in mediation slightly improved, but overall effects remained negligible. Confidence in this cell is low due to reliance on a single study.

Long summary

The intervention

The NSP was a large-scale community-driven development (CDD) initiative that provided block grants and established elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) to promote participatory local governance and infrastructure development. The program sought to enhance social cohesion, local democracy, and inclusive decision-making..

How the intervention is expected to work

NSP aimed to improve local governance and conflict resolution through democratic participation and shared community projects. By empowering CDCs to manage grants and mediate community priorities, the intervention was expected to strengthen trust, reduce disputes, and foster peaceful collaboration. Enhanced participation of women in governance was also intended to promote inclusive conflict management.

The evidence base

The cell includes one randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted across 500 villages in 10 districts of Afghanistan's Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces.

Evidence findings

NSP intervention had no effect on overall diplomatic relations or peaceful dispute resolution. Initial increases in disputes and reduced resolution rates during implementation were followed by a reversion to baseline levels. While women's involvement in mediation rose temporarily, long-term effects on governance or community harmony were absent.

Included studies

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. Finding suggests that there is weak evidence that NSP increases disputes and feuds while reducing resolution rates, likely due to competition over block grants during project selection but by end line this effect disappears with weak evidence of a 1% reduction in intra-village disputes. There is no evidence that NSP influences the frequency of disputes reported by village leaders or the likelihood of successful dispute resolution. There is no significant evidence that NSP impacts dispute mediation for men however, NSP slightly increases women's participation in dispute resolution, though its impact on broader governance structures remains limited. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

Overall: low confidence due to limited number of studies in the cell.

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Nature and scale of violence or atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & Acceptance of diversity
- Community and state governance/Access to justice, rights and public services/Civic participation/Government performance
- Human security/Economic security/Educational security/Food security and nutrition & Health security/Physical security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes