

Effects of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity

Social funds, community-driven development (CDD), and reconstruction programs had a small effect on trust and acceptance of diversity, with localized improvements in some contexts but limited broader impact on social cohesion.

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

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.037$)

Confidence in study findings: Moderate confidence (10 studies; 40 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, CDD, and reconstruction programs had mixed effects on trust and acceptance of diversity, resulting in a small overall effect. Some interventions improved trust toward specific groups, such as NGOs, local leaders, or ex-combatants, and enhanced support for interethnic and interreligious relations in localized contexts. However, broader trust beyond existing social networks remained largely unchanged, and improvements in acceptance of diversity were often context-specific and not sustained over time. Confidence in this cell is moderate due to variability in effect sizes, although most studies were rated as high confidence.

Long summary

The intervention

Interventions included community-driven development programs, social funds, governance participation initiatives, leadership training, and anti-extremism activities. Programs provided block grants, facilitated participatory local decision-making, supported infrastructure projects, promoted civic engagement, and encouraged inclusive governance. Some interventions incorporated media campaigns, vocational training, mediation, and cultural activities to foster trust and social cohesion.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions aim to enhance trust and acceptance of diversity by promoting collective decision-making, local governance, and community participation. Providing financial resources, infrastructure, and training empowers communities, encourages inclusive leadership, and strengthens trust across diverse groups. Social funds and CDD programs create shared economic and social incentives to promote cooperation and reduce social divisions. Leadership training and civic engagement improve transparency, accountability, and participation in governance, while anti-extremism initiatives use dialogue, media, and livelihood support to counter radicalization and foster acceptance of diversity, building resilience against conflict and social fragmentation.

The evidence base

The cell includes ten impact evaluations and four systematic reviews, with a moderate degree of consistency in the findings. The evaluations used randomized controlled trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental designs, and difference-in-differences (DiD) analyses, employing household surveys, behavioral experiments, focus groups, and indirect survey methods, with some longitudinal and others cross-sectional. One qualitative study (Rojas, 2018) from Colombia was included. Research was conducted in Sudan, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Jamaica.

Evidence findings

Social funds, CDD, and reconstruction programs had a small effect on trust and acceptance of diversity, with some localized improvements but no broad or lasting effects on social cohesion beyond existing social networks.

The review evidence

Systematic reviews suggested that social funds, CDD, and reconstruction programs can improve social cohesion, although effects are generally modest and context-dependent.

The impact evaluation evidence

Avdeenko (2014) evaluated a community-driven development (CDD) intervention in Sudan aimed at fostering social cohesion and civic engagement. The research was conducted across various rural villages, where the program encouraged collective action, governance participation, and infrastructure development. The study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design, comparing treatment and control villages. The sample included over 1,400 participants. The program did not significantly increase connectedness beyond family and neighbours. On average, subjects were related to 22% of the group and socialized with 13%. The mean effect was negative indicating the program did not broaden social ties beyond pre-existing relationships. No significant differences were observed in trust behaviours. Contributions in public goods games remained at 76%, and trust game measures of generosity and reciprocity showed no effect. The ATT for trustworthiness was -0.03 ($p > 0.1$), reinforcing that trust levels did not increase. For Perceptions of Community Cohesion, self-reported data indicated improvements, reflecting stronger agreement on community cooperation and participation. Improvements were reported in cooperation for development projects ($p < 0.01$) and decision-making ease (< 0.01). The study was assigned a medium confidence rating primarily due to an overall attrition rate that exceeded 20%. This is evident from the fact that out of the 576 households sampled for the survey, only 475 sent a representative to the game's session, indicating a significant level of attrition.

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 showed mixed results across social cohesion, gender attitudes, and trust measures. Social Cohesion saw no significant improvement, with weak evidence of reduced disputes and increased trust among men, no lasting effect ($p > 0.1$). Gender Attitudes improved, with increased male acceptance of female participation in politics and governance ($p < 0.01$), while women's mobility outside the village also increased ($p < 0.05$). Interpersonal Trust showed no effect at endline, and no impact on women's trust ($p > 0.1$). The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Böhnke (2013) examines the relationship between aid distribution and threat perception in northeast Afghanistan, focusing on the provinces of Kunduz and Takhar. Data were collected through surveys in 2007 and 2009 from 80 Afghan communities. The study utilizes a quasi-experimental design with regression models to assess the impact of aid on security perceptions. The sample consists of 1,617 respondents across multiple villages. The study found no significant improvement in attitudes toward foreign forces, with perceptions of their presence declining slightly ($p > 0.1$). Attitudes toward development actors remained unchanged ($p > 0.1$). Aid did not positively influence acceptance of

foreign actors, and security perceptions worsened, with threat perception increasing in aid-receiving communities ($p < 0.01$). The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to limitation in the data quality. The study acknowledged potential problems with data quality, particularly regarding the measurement of aid projects.

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. The social capital intervention in post-conflict Nicaraguan communities showed mixed results in trust in most people. General trust increased from 13% to 22% in intervention areas but remained statistically insignificant ($p = 0.173$). However, trust in neighbors' assistance significantly improved by 18.1% ($p < 0.1$). 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 program had no significant overall impact on trust in Sierra Leone. Of 12 trust measures, only one was statistically significant, showing increased trust in NGOs and donor projects ($p = 0.064$). Other trust-related measures, including trust in fellow villagers and officials, showed no significant effects. 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. The study found that interpersonal trust remained stable in Chad and Niger but declined in Burkina Faso, with the program offsetting this decline in core zones ($p < .05$). Institutional trust significantly increased in Chad and Burkina Faso, with a pooled effect size of .33 ($p < .01$). Support for interethnic marriage increased in all three countries, with a significant increase in Burkina Faso ($p < .01$). Perceived ethnic differences declined significantly in Chad ($p < .05$) and Burkina Faso ($p < .10$). Perceived religious differences significantly declined across all three countries, with a pooled effect size of $-.197$ ($p < .05$). Anti-West attitudes declined in all three countries but were not attributed to the program ($p > .10$). The program had the most pronounced effects in Burkina Faso, where social cohesion and institutional trust significantly improved, while effects were weaker or non-existent in Chad and Niger. We have high and confidence quantitative study.

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 study found that Trust, measured by the willingness to lend money to other village members, increased for ex-combatants ($p < 0.05$) but had weak overall significance. The presence of cleavages in the village, including economic, generational, and religious divisions, declined but remained statistically insignificant. Inter-village cooperation, measured by willingness to share resources, showed no significant impact from the intervention. We have high and confidence quantitative study.

Kings (2013) The Kokoyah Millennium Villages Project (KMVP) was implemented in Bong County, Liberia, aiming to improve welfare and social cohesion in post-conflict communities. It was designed as a multi-sectoral intervention targeting agriculture, health, education, and infrastructure. The study used a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences (DID) design, comparing 16 project villages (360 respondents) with 30 matched comparison villages (428 respondents), totalling 788 baseline participants. The follow-up survey had an attrition rate of 25%, with 592 re-surveyed respondents. The study found mixed effects on trust and community networks. Trust in national government declined overall but declined less in project areas, showing a 0.2 increase in trust relative to control ($p < 0.05$). Trust in local government saw no significant change ($p > 0.1$). Trust in neighbors showed a small, non-significant increase of 0.15 points. Community network rating (willingness to turn to community members for help) remained unchanged ($p > 0.1$). This study has 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 study found mixed results on social cohesion and trust. The Social Cohesion Index showed no overall effect, but intra-community trust increased with greater program participation. Trust in community members improved significantly with program dosage, especially in villages with diverse ethnic groups. Trust in other groups increased only where infrastructure and cultural activities were implemented but mediation and livelihood activities showed no effect. Cohabitation between ethnic groups improved in diverse villages but declined in homogeneous ones ($p < 0.1$). Leaders keeping commitments improved slightly with increased program participation ($p < 0.1$). Interaction with other groups and quality of interactions increased in villages with cultural and infrastructure projects ($p < 0.05$). The study is considered low confidence quantitative study.

Rao (2005) examines the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), a community-driven development initiative providing grants for infrastructure projects. Conducted in Jamaica, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative data from five matched pairs of communities and quantitative survey data from 500 households (684 individuals). Findings indicate that community leader responsiveness was mixed; while 80% of residents expressed satisfaction with project outcomes, decision-making was often elite-driven. Better educated and well-networked individuals dominated participation, limiting broad-based involvement. Trust in the community increased in JSIF communities by 8.86 percentage points compared to non-JSIF areas significantly. The nearest neighbor estimate indicates a mean increase of 0.13 but improvements were concentrated among better-networked and economically stable individuals. The study is considered low confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell is moderate due to most studies being rated as high confidence, despite some inconsistency in effect sizes

Link to review summaries

White (2018)

Lwamba (2022)

Wong (2012)

King (2010)

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/Willingness to participate or help
- Community and state governance/Government performance/Access to rights, justice and public services/Civic participation
- Human security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes/food security and nutrition and health security/Educational security/Physical Security/ Political security/Economical security