

Effect of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on government performance

Community-driven development (CDD) and social funds modestly improved citizen perceptions of government and participation but had limited impact on sustaining institutional reform, accountability, and transparency, resulting in a **small effect**.

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

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.043$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (8 studies; 147 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, CDD, and reconstruction programs had mixed effects on government performance. Interventions modestly increased citizen perceptions of government actors, local governance, and participation, with some improvements in female representation. However, most programs did not achieve lasting institutional change, enhance accountability, or improve service delivery. Elite capture, parallel governance structures, and exclusionary decision-making often constrained impact, and observed gains frequently faded after the intervention ended. Confidence in this cell is low due to inconsistencies in effect sizes and the predominance of low-confidence studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions focused on social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs aimed at improving governance, local service delivery, and participatory decision-making. Initiatives included establishing elected councils, funding infrastructure projects, promoting participatory governance, providing block grants, and facilitating community engagement or mediation activities to enhance legitimacy, social cohesion, and institutional accountability.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions are intended to foster participatory governance, strengthen local institutions, and improve service delivery, thereby enhancing government performance and legitimacy. Block grants and infrastructure projects empower communities to identify and address local development needs. Elected councils and representative assemblies aim to increase accountability and responsiveness. Community-driven engagement promotes trust, reduces elite dominance, and encourages inclusive governance. By combining resource access with transparent decision-making, these programs are expected to enhance perceptions of government effectiveness and support sustainable institutional reforms.

The evidence base

The cell includes eight impact evaluations and two systematic reviews. There is a low to moderate degree of consistency in the review findings. Studies employed randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, propensity score matching, and difference-in-differences analysis, using household surveys, focus groups, audits, and administrative data.

The studies were conducted in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Jamaica, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Niger, covering rural and urban communities across multiple provinces and districts.

Evidence findings

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had mixed effects on government performance, improving perceptions, participation, and legitimacy but failing to sustain institutional change, accountability, or service quality. Elite capture and exclusionary decision-making often limited equitable outcomes.

The review evidence

Systematic reviews suggest that these interventions generally had weak or insignificant effects on governance and service delivery. While some programs improved state legitimacy and participation, elite capture constrained equitable decision-making and the long-term impact on institutional performance.

The impact evaluation evidence

Beath (2012) examines the impact of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) in Afghanistan, focusing on security perceptions. The intervention aimed to foster local governance through elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) and infrastructure projects. Conducted across 500 villages, with 250 receiving NSP, the study followed a randomized controlled trial design. The study found that the National Solidarity Program (NSP) significantly improved perceptions of government actors and civil society, with district governors ($p < 0.01$), provincial governors ($p < 0.01$), central government officials ($p < 0.01$), the President of Afghanistan ($p < 0.01$), members of parliament ($p < 0.01$), government judges ($p < 0.01$), national police ($p < 0.01$), NGO employees ($p < 0.01$), and ISAF soldiers ($p < 0.05$). However, in the eastern districts, effects were negative for provincial governors ($p < 0.01$), central officials ($p < 0.05$), the president ($p < 0.01$), MPs ($p < 0.01$), judges ($p < 0.1$), police ($p < 0.01$), and NGOs ($p < 0.01$). The summary measure improved by 12.8% of a standard deviation ($p < 0.01$) but declined by 17.7% ($p < 0.01$) in eastern districts. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to presence of sample 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) significantly increased female representation in local governance ($p < 0.01$) and assemblies ($p < 0.01$). It also enhanced local governance services ($p < 0.01$), village leadership activity ($p < 0.01$), and the role of representative assemblies ($p < 0.01$). Perceptions of governance quality declined ($p < 0.05$), and informal taxation increased ($p < 0.05$). NSP improved democratic values ($p < 0.01$), state legitimacy ($p < 0.01$), and perceptions of central ($p < 0.01$) and sub-national governments ($p < 0.01$), but its effects faded post-implementation. 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 that aid increased perceptions of state legitimacy ($p < 0.01$), indicating that aid positively influenced views of the government's responsiveness. However, threat perceptions also increased ($p < 0.01$). No significant impact was observed on attitudes toward foreign military or development actors. Perceptions of security drove attitudes toward international forces more than aid did. 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.

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 had minimal effects on changing local systems of authority ($p = 0.36$), suggesting no significant shifts in leadership roles or public perception of traditional versus elected leaders. 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 Tuungane 1 program had no significant effect on the capacity of health ($p = 0.89$) or education service provision ($p = 0.74$). There were no detectable improvements in the presence of supplies and materials for health ($p = 0.81$) or education ($p = 0.65$). Staff quality remained unchanged in health ($p = 0.92$) and education ($p = 0.48$). Administrative effectiveness in both sectors showed no significant impact ($p = 0.83$). 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 had no significant impact on the quality of health facilities' floors, walls or facilities. There was also no significant improvement in school floor quality, wall quality or roof quality. Health staff quality, including doctor/nurse ratio remained unchanged. Community governance improved slightly, with accountability-related activities increasing by 6.4% ($p < 0.05$), but transparency indicators showed no significant changes. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Lichtenheld (2022) 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 modestly improved government communication and listening, with more respondents reporting that leaders kept their commitments to the community (+2.5%, $p < 0.05$). However, participation in decision-making did not significantly increase. Infrastructure and cultural activities had the strongest effects on perceived government responsiveness, while mediation and livelihoods activities showed limited impact. The study is considered low confidence qualitative 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. JSIF improved community trust and collective action capacity ($p < 0.05$) but was more beneficial to elites. Decisions by community leaders reflected existing social hierarchies rather than democratic participation (+5.3%, $p < 0.05$). Although JSIF projects were seen as beneficial, participation in decision-making was often low, reinforcing existing power structures. The study is considered low confidence qualitative study.

Confidence assessment

Confidence in this cell is low due to variability in effect sizes, with the majority of studies rated as low confidence.

Link to review summaries

White (2018)

Wong (2012)

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/Civic participation/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