

Effect of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on physical security

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had a small effect on physical security, improving perceived safety but not reducing actual violence or insurgent threats.

Geographical region: South Asia,

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.031$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (3 studies; 13 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs in Afghanistan modestly enhanced perceptions of security through local governance and community engagement, but they had minimal impact on actual violence or insurgent activity. Low confidence reflects the limited number of studies in the cell.

Long summary

The intervention

Programs included social funds and community-driven development initiatives, establishing Community Development Councils (CDCs), block grants, infrastructure projects, and gender-balanced local councils to improve governance, economic well-being, and security.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions aimed to strengthen governance, community participation, and public service delivery. By funding infrastructure (roads, schools, water access) and empowering CDCs to allocate resources, they sought to enhance state legitimacy, reduce support for insurgents, and improve livelihoods, thereby increasing perceived and actual security over time.

The evidence base

The cell includes three primary studies and two systematic reviews, with high consistency in review findings. The primary studies used two RCTs and one quasi-experimental design, covering provinces such as Balkh, Baghlan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, Nangarhar, Kunduz, and Takhar.

Evidence findings

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction interventions improved perceived security but had **small effect** on reducing actual violence or insurgent threats, limiting their real-world impact.

The review evidence

Targeted interventions showed modest localized effects, including increased representation of women in governance and post-conflict processes, but long-term behavioral and security outcomes were limited.

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. Key security perception findings suggested that in male respondents 65.5% of control group respondents believed security improved in the past two years, with a 5.8 percentage point increase in treatment villages. 12.1% in control villages thought security deteriorated, decreasing by 2.6 percentage points in treatment areas. Overall, 9.9 percentage point improvement in treatment villages. In female respondents 29.2% in control areas believed women felt safer working for NGOs or attending training, increasing by 4.9 percentage points in treatment villages. 17.1% believed women felt less safe, decreasing by 3.9 percentage points. 29.4% felt teenage girls' security in travel/socializing improved, increasing by 4.4 percentage points. 21.3% believed teenage girls felt less safe, which dropped by 3.7 percentage points. Overall security perception improved by 9.8 percentage points for females. Overall, the NSP improved security perceptions but did not significantly affect actual security incidents. We have low confidence in the study due to no significant reduction in actual security incidents, limiting its real-world impact on violence. It excludes highly violent regions (e.g., the South), making results less generalizable to conflict-heavy areas. 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 study finds that perceptions of security improved in villages receiving the National Solidarity Program (NSP), with a 5-percentage point increase in the proportion of male villagers who believed security had improved over the past year. Female respondents also reported improved security for women working with NGOs or attending training courses. However, there is no evidence that NSP reduced actual violent incidents or insurgent taxation, and its effects were not observed at the endline. These findings suggest that while NSP improved security perceptions, its tangible impact on violence remained limited. We have low confidence in the study arises from the short evaluation timeframe, which failed to capture long-term institutional changes, and the introduction of parallel governance structures without clear roles, leading to weakened accountability and fading governance impacts post-intervention. 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 finds that aid does not reduce threat perception but, in some cases, increases it. Specifically, perceived community aid in 2009 is significantly correlated with a rise in threat perception. Households that received more aid were more likely to feel threatened, possibly due to fears of Taliban reprisals or the association of aid with corruption and insecurity. Aid

recipients were also more likely to view the state as legitimate, but this did not translate into reduced threat perception. These findings challenge the assumption that aid inherently fosters stability and instead suggest that it can create new security risks for local populations. We have low confidence in the study due to self-reported threat perceptions findings and while internally valid, results may not generalize to high-conflict areas like southern Afghanistan. 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.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell is low due to the limited number of studies.

Link to review summaries

Lwamba (2022)

Wong (2012)

Other outcomes in the study:

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Diplomatic relation and dispute resolution/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/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes