

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

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had a small effect on political security, moderately improving women's participation and governance but failing to create lasting institutional change or political stability due to weak structures and short evaluation periods.

Geographical region: South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa.

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.028$)

Confidence in study findings: Moderate confidence (5 studies; 21 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction interventions had a small effect on political security. Programs such as Afghanistan's NSP and DRC's Tuungane 2 increased women's representation and local governance participation. However, most interventions, including GoBifo in Sierra Leone and PEACE in Niger, showed limited impact on long-term institutional change, accountability, or political stability. Moderate confidence in this cell reflects inconsistencies in effect sizes across studies.

Long summary

The intervention

Interventions included community-driven development (CDD), social funds, and governance-strengthening activities via participatory decision-making and local development projects. Components included block grants, infrastructure, mediation, civic engagement, vocational training, and gender quotas. While some focused on women's empowerment and governance participation, others targeted social cohesion and resilience to extremism.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions aim to engage communities in decision-making, allocate resources, and strengthen local governance. Infrastructure and block grants are intended to improve economic development and public services. Dialogue, mediation, and vocational training aim to enhance social cohesion and counter extremism. Gender-focused initiatives, including quotas and leadership training, target women's empowerment in governance. Overall, by fostering collaboration and inclusive decision-making, the programs seek to build trust, reduce social divisions, and support longer-term stability and resilience in fragile contexts.

The evidence base

The cell includes six impact evaluations and one systematic review. Studies used randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental designs. Four RCTs were conducted in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and DRC, and two quasi-experimental studies were conducted in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger, including Niger's Tillabéri region.

Evidence findings

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction had a small positive effect on political security. Some programs improved women's political participation and local governance, but most interventions did not achieve sustained institutional change, accountability, or broader political stability. Short evaluation periods and weak governance structures limited long-term impacts.

The review evidence

Although positive effects were observed in targeted intervention areas, their impact on long-term behavioural changes was smaller. Increased representation of women in local and subnational civil and political processes, including during peacebuilding and post-conflict restoration.

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. The study found significant impacts on gender attitudes and participation in governance. At endline, NSP increased acceptance of female political participation by 4.6 percentage points ($p=0.005$) and female involvement in local governance by 7.9 percentage points ($p=0.000$). Additionally, there was a 22% rise in acceptance of female membership in village councils and a 15% increase in acceptance of women selecting the village headman. However, there was no lasting impact on women's social activities, with insignificant changes in female socialization. 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 Project had no statistically significant impact on fostering more liberal political and social attitudes ($p=0.041$). It failed to shift entrenched increase women's participation beyond project activities. 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. Political participation increased slightly in Chad (0.3%) and Niger (-0.5%) but declined significantly in Burkina Faso (-31%, $p<0.01$). Political efficacy dropped in Chad (-18%, $p<0.10$) and Niger (-10%) but improved in Burkina Faso (+27%, $p<0.05$).

Political knowledge improved in Niger (+6%, $p < 0.05$) but remained insignificant elsewhere. The study is rated as high and medium 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. They found that no significant effect on perceptions of leader responsibilities ($p > 0.05$). 84% of villagers reported they were free to express opinions; Tuungane had no significant impact ($p > 0.05$). Minor declines in perceived duty to participate, but effects were not statistically significant. No increase in complaints despite expectations of greater accountability ($p > 0.05$). Complaints were common, particularly about lack of information (37% in control areas); no significant Tuungane effect. 900 USD was announced, but 1,000 USD was disbursed, testing awareness. Villagers were not significantly more informed in Tuungane areas. No significant increase in the willingness of citizens to seek details about funding ($p > 0.05$). 41% preferred community-led governance over chief-led governance; chiefs remained influential. No evidence that gender parity rules strengthened women's roles; some indications of negative effects on attitudes toward women's participation in political decisions. Overall, the Tuungane program did not significantly alter political engagement, transparency, or accountability. 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 findings suggested that women's representation in committees increased 40% in intervention areas ($p < 0.01$). Gender rights perception there was no significant difference. Women's association membership was slight increase (7% rise, $p < 0.05$), but participation remained low. More girls received uninterrupted schooling in intervention areas, but they were also more likely to have never attended school ($p < 0.1$). The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell is moderate due to inconsistencies in effect sizes across studies, although all individual studies are considered high confidence.

Link to review summaries

Lwamba (2022)

Other outcomes in the study:

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Diplomatic relation and dispute resolution/Nature and scale of violence or atrocities/ Social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & Acceptance of diversity/Willingness to participate or help
- 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