

Effect of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on willingness to participate or help

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had a **moderate effect** on collective action and social cohesion, showing some sustained behavioural change.

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

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.167$)

Confidence in study findings: Moderate confidence (11 studies; 38 ES)

Short summary

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction initiatives had mixed effects on willingness to participate or help. Several interventions increased participation in community groups, civic engagement, and contributions to public goods, particularly where communication, democratic decision-making, and collaboration were emphasized. However, other studies showed minimal or no sustained impact, with behavioural changes often limited to membership rather than active involvement. The pooled effect is moderate, though confidence in the cell is moderate due to inconsistencies across studies, with nearly half of them rated as low confidence.

Long summary

The intervention

These interventions aim to strengthen local governance, foster social cohesion, and enhance collective action. They typically provide funding for infrastructure, promote participatory decision-making, and encourage civic engagement. Some include leadership training, public goods games, and facilitated community planning to build trust and cooperation.

How the intervention is expected to work

The programs aim to empower communities to take collective action by improving governance structures and fostering trust. By providing funding for locally prioritized projects, they encourage participatory decision-making and community ownership. Facilitated discussions and leadership training are designed to enhance social cohesion, cooperation, and collective problem-solving. Public goods games and structured engagement activities reinforce pro-social behaviour, trust, and accountability, helping to sustain improvements in governance, social capital, and collective action over time.

The evidence base

The cell includes ten impact evaluations and one systematic review. Consistency across findings is low. The studies used randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs, difference-in-differences, public goods games, and mixed methods.

Research was conducted in Colombia, Sudan, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Jamaica.

Evidence findings

Social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction programs had mixed but overall moderate effects on willingness to participate or help. Some interventions increased engagement and contributions to collective efforts, while others showed minimal or no sustained behavioural change.

The review evidence

The review evidence suggested that social funds, community-driven development, and reconstruction interventions impact on willingness to participate or help was weakly positive, with inconsistent results across studies.

The impact evaluation evidence

Attanasio (2009) evaluates the impact of the PRDP initiative on social capital through a public goods game experiment conducted in Colombia. The intervention aims to foster cooperation and public good contributions at the municipal level. The research design involves a comparison of treatment and control areas, with participants assigned to a game where they decide whether to invest in a public pot, representing their willingness to contribute to communal welfare. The study sample includes 3,674 participants in the first round and 2,170 in the second round. Findings indicate that in the matched comparison, the contribution to the public good increased by 24.6% in the first round and 31.4% in the second round ($p < 0.01$). In PRDP municipalities only, knowledge of the program led to an 8-9% increase in first-round contributions ($p < 0.05$), but no significant second-round effect. The treatment-control area comparison showed a 26.5% increase in contributions in round 1 and 29.6% in round 2 ($p < 0.01$). The second round confirmed a 29-percentage-point increase in contribution likelihood among treatment participants, independent of prior behaviour. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is a non-experimental study.

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 study found that observed game behavior related to social capital showed no significant positive effect. Favor exchange relations showed a negligible impact, with babysitting rates unchanged and advice-giving increasing slightly by 0.02. Basic economic relations were largely unaffected, with buy/sell relations dropping by 0.02 ($p > 0.1$) and employment measures unchanged. Voluntary group participation declined in producers' groups by 0.10 and PTA involvement by 0.03. Perceptions of community cohesion improved slightly, yet the observed pro-social behavior remained largely unchanged. 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.

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 study found increased participation in groups (up to 11.9%, $p < 0.1$), contributions (26.2%, $p > 0.1$), and neighbor assistance (29.8%, $p < 0.1$). Community participation rose 3.1 times ($p < 0.01$), with improved engagement in discussions, health reporting, and NGO donations. 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 study found that participation in community groups and networks saw a small positive effect (0.033, $p=0.044$), with increased involvement in savings groups, labor gangs, school committees, social clubs, and women's groups. However, there was no significant impact on attendance, financial contributions, or labor contributions within these groups (-0.000 , $p=0.038$), indicating limited behavioral change beyond membership. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

D'Exelle (2018) examines the impact of Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) programs on collective action in Colombia using a lab-in-the-field experiment in 42 municipalities. The intervention aimed to foster social cooperation through development projects led by local councils. The study involved 1,808 participants—both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of CDR programs—engaging in a binary public goods game across two rounds, with a communication stage in between. Findings indicate that cooperation significantly increased after communication ($p<0.000$). The likelihood of cooperation post-communication increased with the proportion of initial cooperators ($p<0.01$). Beneficiaries exerted a stronger peer influence on collective action than non-beneficiaries, with their cooperative behavior significantly predicting increased cooperation among non-beneficiaries ($p=0.01$). The findings highlight CDR programs' potential for fostering social cohesion beyond direct beneficiaries, primarily through peer-driven communication. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Fearon (2015) examines the impact of a Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) program in post-conflict Liberia, focusing on collective action through average contributions in a public goods game. Conducted in 42 randomly selected treatment communities and 41 control communities across Voinjama and Zorzor districts, the intervention aimed to strengthen governance and cooperation through elected councils and community projects. The study involved 1,992 participants across mixed-gender and women-only groups. Findings indicate that the CDR program increased average contributions a 7.5% rise ($p=0.037$). However, this effect was observed only in mixed-gender communities, where contributions increased significantly from 200 to 243 LD ($p <0.001$). In contrast, in women-only communities, the CDR intervention had no effect, with contributions decreasing slightly from 253 to 242 LD ($p=0.205$). Contributions were also influenced by return rates; increasing the return from 100% to 400% raised contributions by 18 LD ($p<0.001$). The study suggests that CDR enhances collective action when fostering collaboration across social groups. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to numerous outcome measures, which can lead to inflated type I error rates and reliance on self-reported data.

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 findings on participation in public good provision indicate mixed effects. Participation increased for road widening projects by 2.21 percentage points ($p<0.1$). This study is high and medium 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 that the number of groups to which respondents belonged increased by 0.4 groups on average ($p < 0.01$), a 26.1% increase from baseline. This suggests improved social cohesion in post-conflict Liberia. This study is low 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. In control areas, 6% of health facility heads reported community contributions in kind, while 4% reported monetary contributions. In Tuungane 2 areas, in-kind contributions were almost three times higher ($p < 0.01$). Villagers' self-reports showed a 2% contribution in kind and 3% in cash in control areas, with Tuungane 2 areas having significantly more frequent in-kind contributions ($p < 0.01$). School directors reported higher community contributions, with 30% in kind and 23% in cash, but no difference between treatment and control areas ($p > 0.1$). Villagers' self-reports for school contributions showed 8% in kind and 6% in cash, with no effect from the Tuungane 2 program ($p > 0.1$). This study is 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 PEACE program increased collective action norms by 14 percentage points in treatment vs. control villages at midline ($p < 0.05$), with higher gains for direct participants at endline. This study is 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). The study found that participation in groups outside the immediate household increased significantly in JSIF communities compared to non-JSIF communities. The difference-in-difference analysis showed that 57.15% of JSIF respondents found it easy or very easy to work with such groups, compared to 48.09% in non-JSIF areas significantly ($p < 0.05$). This study is low confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The cell's confidence is rated as moderate due to inconsistencies in effect sizes, with nearly half of the studies classified as low confidence.

Link to review summaries

King (2010)

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/ Nature and scale of violence and atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feeling of trust and acceptance of diversity
- 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/ Political security/ Economic security