

Effect of training & job creation on intermediate social cohesion

Training and job creation interventions, particularly sport-based programs, have a large positive effect on intermediate social cohesion.

Geographic scope: Sub Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean

Effect: Large effect ($g=0.26$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (3 studies with 40 effect sizes)

Short Summary

Training and job creation programs, including vocational training and sport-for-development initiatives, have a large effect on intermediate social cohesion outcomes. Programs such as INVEST in Afghanistan and L.A.C.E.S. in Liberia show mixed effects—vocational training alone had limited impact on self-efficacy, while sport-based programs improved social responsibility and sense of purpose.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions in this cell include vocational training, cash-for-work, and sport-for-development programs. The INVEST program in Afghanistan provided vocational training alongside unconditional cash transfers to young men and women, equipping them with employable skills and assessing impacts on self-efficacy and attitudes toward violence. In Liberia, the L.A.C.E.S. program combined sports, mentorship, and character education to foster social responsibility and purpose among marginalized youth. These programs integrate technical skills development with personal growth, leadership, and psychosocial support.

How the intervention is expected to work

These programs are expected to enhance social cohesion by improving economic prospects and psychosocial well-being. Vocational training increases employability, fostering self-reliance and purpose. Mentorship and structured community engagement encourage social responsibility, while sport-based programs like L.A.C.E.S. promote pro-social behavior, teamwork, discipline, and moral values. Cash transfers paired with training may reduce financial stress, decreasing frustration and anger associated with unemployment.

The evidence base

This cell includes 5 studies: 1 systematic review, 1 qualitative study, and 3 quantitative studies.

The primary studies are set in Uganda (1 study), Liberia (1), Afghanistan (1), and Colombia (1 study).

The review examines the integration of psychosocial support with livelihood interventions in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCS). It assesses whether this combination improves both mental well-being and economic resilience.

Evidence findings

Randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental studies show a large effect of training and job creation interventions on intermediate social cohesion outcomes. In Afghanistan, vocational training alone had limited impact on self-efficacy and social responsibility, though combining it with cash transfers improved outcomes. In Liberia, the sport-for-development program increased social responsibility and strengthened participants' sense of purpose.

The review evidence

Evidence from the systematic reviews indicates that livelihood programs alone do not necessarily improve psychosocial well-being; however, when paired with economic support, they produce stronger and more sustained positive effects on mental well-being.

The impact evaluation evidence

There are 3 impact evaluations. Three summaries are thus provided here:

Baseler (2021) The study investigated two programs for Ugandan (host) microentrepreneurs: cash grants delivered with information that connects the grant with Uganda's inclusive refugee policies and existing aid-sharing policy, and mentorship by an experienced refugee. This tests whether mentorship is an effective means to promote skill transfer across nationalities and increase small business profits. The study is designed as a randomized controlled trial. The main sample consisted of 1,406 Ugandan businesses. These were randomly assigned to treatments (cash and information, cash, information, a refugee mentor, a Ugandan mentor) or control. The study found a positive effect of all treatment groups on the main outcome, a pre-specified index of policy preferences – inclusive policies including refugees' right to work and hosting additional refugees, that is statically significant at the 10% level. The cash and information combined treatment (T1), however, has a larger effect than the other four treatments. The study is rated as medium confidence.

Blom (2021) The study aimed to assess whether participation in the L.A.C.E.S. sport-for-development program could enhance indicators of positive youth development – specifically social responsibility, close personal relationships, peace, and purpose – among Liberian youth. It also sought to identify the experiences, relationships, and conditions that fostered or hindered healthy development. The Life and Change Experienced Through Sport (L.A.C.E.S.) program, established in Liberia in 2007, promotes life skills and leadership through mentor-based soccer and kickball leagues. The 40-week program includes practice, games, life lessons, and family visits, emphasizing values such as self-esteem, respect, teamwork, and discipline. Meals are provided during sessions to support youth well-being. The study employed a mixed-methods quasiexperimental design with 181 Liberian youth (54% female), aged 9-13, participating during the 2016-2017 program year. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-intervention surveys, while qualitative data included interviews and photojournalistic exercises where youth documented factors influencing their development. The program led to significant decreases in attitude toward violence (moderate effect size, partial $\eta^2 = .36$) and increased in social

responsibility (partial $\eta^2 = .34$) and sense of purpose (partial $\eta^2 = .22$). The study is rated as medium confidence as it is non-experimental study design.

Kurtz (2018) examines the effect of the UK-supported INVEST program, which offered vocational and technical training courses in nine technical vocational education and training (TVET) centres in Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan from 2011. The programme was implemented by a US NGO, Mercy Corps. At the time of the evaluation 25,000 students had graduated from the programme of which nearly on-third were women. The study used propensity score matching to match recruits from February to April 2014 with successful applicants who had not yet started the programme. The program had no impact on participants' feelings of being respected, personal confidence, or their perceived social standing in their community. The study is rated low confidence because of lack of information on power calculations.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: The cell is rated low confidence due to the limited number of studies, and the effects are inconsistent across them.

Link to review summaries

Lwamba (2022)

All studies may be accessed via the EGM.

Other outcomes in the study:

Violence and atrocity prevention / Social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Community and state governance / Government performance

Human security / Economic security