

Impact of non-conflict interventions on de-escalation of conflict and acceptance of negotiations

Sumedh Rao
Independent consultant
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Question

"Identify literature which shows how non-conflict (e.g. humanitarian, environmental) interventions have impacted on the de-escalation of conflict and acceptance of negotiations. Where possible, focus on contexts of protracted, multi-actor conflicts and the role of local conflict actors."

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1. Summary

There is a broad range of academic and grey literature that looks at non-conflict interventions and its impact on de-escalation of conflict and reduction of violence. There seems to be little in relation to the acceptance of negotiations. Of this literature there are a few studies of high quality that demonstrate a clear connection between the intervention and reduction in violence or conflict. The quality assessment of the literature is based on the criteria set out in the how-to note on assessing the strength of evidence (i.e. DFID 2014). This report focuses on those studies and, in particular, those related to protracted conflict and involving local actors.

The following section outlines a summary of these studies, followed by an annotated bibliography of the studies, with sections 2 to 9 exclusively composed of high-quality studies and sections 10 and 11 drawing on moderate-quality studies for the emerging area of humanitarian interventions and environmental interventions.

Community-Driven Development

Community-driven development (CDD) programmes relate to a range of projects where decision-making and resources are transferred to local communities from national and international funders (Beath et al., 2017). There have been a number of high-quality studies on CDD and its impact on conflict and violence with recent synthesis studies finding that the evidence is mixed as to whether CDD reduces or increases violence (Cramer et al., 2016; Knox et al., 2021). The degree to which the programmes were effective largely came down to the specificity of the programme and how it changed the balance of incentives between local communities and violent actors such as insurgents.

A Philippines study found that the CDD programme provided a focus for insurgents to attack so as to undermine government support with a notable increase in conflict violence in areas that were eligible for the programme (Croft et al., 2014). In contrast, an Iraqi study found that CDD programmes are effective if they are modest in scope, operate in a secure environment (guaranteed by government control) and informed by local preferences (Berman et al., 2013). A final, notable study, this time from Afghanistan, attributed effectiveness of CDD programmes to the makeup of the insurgency: CDD was least effective closer to the Pakistan border due to a greater makeup of foreign insurgents (Beath et al., 2017).

Employment creation

There is overlap between CDD and employment creation programmes in that some CDDs have employment creation components. However, the articles in this section are differentiated as they highlight the role of employment creation, in particular, in relation to conflict de-escalation and violence reduction.

Berman et al. (2011) argue, in their Iraq study, that there is a dilemma for civilians as to who to cooperate with. On the one hand, there are insurgents looking to achieve political change through violence and, on the other, there is a government countering this through service

provision and counterinsurgency measures. In this context, employment creation programmes and other small-scale programmes could shift the incentive structure promoting civilian cooperation with the government and away from engaging in insurgency violence. A similar finding was found in an Indian study, where the employment creation programme reduced the financial incentives to join Maoist insurgencies, resulting in lower levels of violence (Dasgupta et al., 2017).

There are other high-quality studies that link employment creation with conflict reduction but only assess intermediate outcomes rather than direct conflict reduction. An experimental study in Liberia found that agricultural training and the provision of capital led to a shift to farming away from illicit activities, including less interest in working as a mercenary when conflict erupted in Cote d'Ivoire (Blattman & Annan, 2016). A mixed method study found that coffee-related entrepreneurship in Rwanda improved perceptions of welfare and intergroup trust, but the study did not assess changes in levels of violence (Tobias et al., 2013).

Conditional Cash Transfers

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) can act in a similar way to CDD and employment creation in providing local incentives to support the government over insurgents but they also have an advantage in that the funds are disbursed directly (Crost et al., 2016). A Philippines CCT study finds that the CCT programme reduced conflict violence significantly in the year after it was introduced (Crost et al., 2016). A high quality Colombian CCT study did not measure violence reduction directly but did find that the CCT programme contributed to demobilisation of combatants but that the effect was weaker in areas where the guerrilla organisation had strong support (Pena et al., 2015).

Justice and reconciliation

Whereas there is substantial literature on the impact of justice and reconciliation measures, there is limited literature which looks at the impact on violence. These studies focus on the post-conflict period and whether the measures lead to a recurrence of conflict. A 2010 study finds that interventions such as domestic human rights trials (as well as international criminal tribunals) do not impact on the recurrence of conflict (Meernik et al., 2010). Conversely, where the post-conflict justice processes target and lessen conflict-induced grievances specifically, the justice measures have been linked with reduction in the recurrence of conflict (Loyle & Appel, 2017).

Mediation

There is insufficient high-quality evidence that mediation, in general, reduces conflict violence and there are very few studies that focus on mediation at the sub-national or local level (Cramer

et al., 2016). The strongest evidence comes from a Liberian study looking at a local mediation approach known as alternative dispute resolution (ADR) which was found to reduce land dispute-violence (Blattman et al., 2014). This ADR intervention was centred on a training programme to help individuals at a local level to resolve disputes.

Vocational education and public education

In relation to interventions that have been found to be ineffective, a high-quality study in Brazil found that a youth violence programme was ineffective in reducing levels of violence (Peres et al., 2010). The programme focused on public education and vocational education for vulnerable adolescents.

Media and communication

There is an emerging body of literature on media and communication, with some high-quality studies demonstrating a change in attitudes but not as yet demonstrating a reduction in violent behaviour (Cramer et al., 2016). Reconciliation-focused radio dramas were found to be linked to a range of positive social psychological outcomes in Rwanda (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013) and Burundi (Bilali et al., 2016). In contrast, a study in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) found more mixed psychological outcomes (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2015).

Humanitarian interventions

Much of the research on humanitarian intervention focuses on of military interventions for humanitarian reasons (e.g. Gizelis & Kosek, 2005) rather than non-military humanitarian interventions. One high quality study on non-military interventions in the post-conflict period found that humanitarian aid reduced the duration of peace post-conflict as it benefited the losing party which in turn encouraged the party to resume violence (Narang, 2014).

Environmental interventions

There is some emerging work on environmental peacebuilding (e.g. Ide, 2019; Ide & Detges, 2018) which argues that shared management of resources can help build institutions that eventually support long term peace, but this is, as yet, not of sufficiently high quality to be conclusive.

2. Community-Driven Development

Crost, B., Felter, J., & Johnston, P. (2014). Aid Under Fire: Development Projects and Civil Conflict. *American Economic Review*, 104(6), 1833–1856. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.6.1833>

This quasi-experimental study, looking at the effect of a large CDD program in the Philippines called KALAHI-CIDSS, found an increase in civil conflict deaths arising from insurgent attacks due to the presence of the programme. The study contrasted municipalities that were close to, but on either side, of the standard of eligibility. Those municipalities that were barely eligible for the programme experienced a notable increase in conflict-related casualties in comparison to those municipalities that were barely ineligible for the programme. The authors conclude that this is because insurgents are looking to sabotage the programme as the success of the programme would undermine their popular support.

Berman, E., Felter, J. H., Shapiro, J. N., & Troland, E. (2013). Modest, Secure, and Informed: Successful Development in Conflict Zones. *American Economic Review*, 103(3), 512–517. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.103.3.512>

This statistical analysis study, looking at Iraq, found how CDD programmes can reduce violence. The study finds the violence reduction effect is strongest when a) the projects are small, b) the troop strength is high and c) when there is an availability of professional development expertise. These elements contributed to programmes i) being secure enough to be able to be implemented, ii) the programme design being in sufficient accordance with community preferences, and iii) implementation that is based on government control of the territory, which in turn was dependent on local cooperation, and in particular information sharing. The authors argue that this supports a “hearts and minds” framework, where interventions that are small, conditional, secure and effective create incentives for cooperation of non-combatants.

Beath, A., Christia, F., & Enikolopov, R. (2017). *Can Development Programs Counter Insurgencies?: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan* (SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 1809677). Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1809677>

This randomised-control study trial looking at Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Program (NSP) found that in most areas the programme reduced insurgent violence, as well as improving economic outcomes and increasing support for the government. The NSP is a CDD, implemented by local and international NGOs, executed by the national government and funded by foreign donors. The study found that the NSP CDD programme led to weak reductions in insurgent violence but that there was a degree of geographical variation. While there were reductions in violence in much of the country, the NSP had no effect on the number of violent incidents in the eastern area of the country and that in areas close to the border of Pakistan, the programme increased insurgent violence. The authors argue that this increase in violence is

attributable to the greater presence of foreigners amongst the insurgents and therefore the insurgency is less reliant on local population support. They conclude that whereas development programmes can reduce local insurgencies this can be the opposite where the insurgents are not embedded in the local population.

3. Employment creation

Berman, E., Shapiro, J. N., & Felter, J. H. (2011). Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq. *Journal of Political Economy*, 119(4), 766–819. <https://doi.org/10.1086/661983>

This statistical analysis study, looking at the impact of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) in Iraq, found spending under certain conditions was associated with a reduction in violence in non-combatants (Berman et al., 2011). Whereas the study found that in general regional spending on local public goods is linked with greater violence, under certain conditions this spending can be violence-reducing. The authors explain this by positing that there is a three-way interaction between insurgents looking to achieve political change through violence, a government trying to reduce violence through service provision and counterinsurgency, and civilians ambivalent about who to cooperate with. They argue that governments hope that civilians share information about insurgents whereas insurgents look to persuade the population to refrain from sharing information by restraining violence to a tolerable level and retaliating against those who do share information. The authors conclude that targeted small-scale projects, such as employment creation in reconstruction programmes, could mean a shift in balance in terms of whether the community shares information as the benefits of sharing would outweigh the costs of sharing. This decision to share leads to a reduction in insurgent violence.

Dasgupta, A., Gawande, K., & Kapur, D. (2017). (When) Do Antipoverty Programs Reduce Violence? India's Rural Employment Guarantee and Maoist Conflict. *International Organization*, 71(3), 605–632. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818317000236>

This statistical analysis looked at the Indian National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), finding that its adoption caused a roughly 80% reduction in violent incidents and deaths in the districts which experienced most Maoist insurgency-related violence. The authors note that this effect was not uniform across districts but concentrated in districts where there was sufficient pre-existing local state capacity. The authors argue that though such anti-poverty employment guarantee schemes can be effective, state capacity plays a crucial role. This is because it shapes the effects of the programme and ensures that the benefits pass on to the local population in sufficient scale to undermine the incentives to participate in the insurgency.

4. Conditional Cash Transfers

Crost, B., Felter, J. H., & Johnston, P. B. (2016). Conditional cash transfers, civil conflict and insurgent influence: Experimental evidence from the Philippines. *Journal of Development Economics*, 118, 171–182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2015.08.005>

This experimental study in the Philippines on Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) found a resultant reduction in civil conflict incidents. The study involved random assignment for eligibility of the Pantawid Pamilya CCT programme, implemented by the Philippine government's Department of Social Welfare and Development. The study finds that the villages that received cash transfers experienced a significant reduction in conflict incidents relative to the control villages that did not receive the transfer. There was a substantial reduction in the first year of the programme, but a smaller, and not statistically significant, decrease in the second year. The study also finds that the treated villages experienced a reduction in influence by insurgents, based on a scale that went from a permanent rebel presence (to indicate strong influence) to no rebel presence or targeting risk by insurgents (to indicate weak influence).

The authors argue that as funds are disbursed locally and directly, CCT programmes can play a stronger role in weakening rebel presence as they are less easy to sabotage, compared to CDD programmes. The authors note, however, that there may have been displacement effects of the violence into areas that were not picked up in this study, and it may have been that cash transfers reduced civilian violence by allowing people to pay money to insurgents to avoid violence.

5. Justice and reconciliation

Meernik, J. D., Nichols, A., & King, K. L. (2010). The Impact of International Tribunals and Domestic Trials on Peace and Human Rights After Civil War: Impact of Transitional Justice. *International Studies Perspectives*, 11(4), 309–334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2010.00414.x>

This statistical analysis study, looking at all countries that have emerged from conflict since 1982, found that domestic human rights trials and international criminal tribunals do not contribute to the reduction of recurrence of conflict or to the improvement of human rights. The authors note that whereas the tribunals and trials have beneficial impacts in some ways, they do not contribute to peace as advocates have posited, i.e. by the provision of justice and truth, and removal of war criminals and potential peace spoilers.

Loyle, C. E., & Appel, B. J. (2017). Conflict Recurrence and Postconflict Justice: Addressing Motivations and Opportunities for Sustainable Peace. *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(3), 690–703. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx045>

This statistical analysis study on post-conflict justice from 1946 and 2006 found that justice that is directed at mitigating individual grievances reduced the likelihood of future conflict. The authors argue that mitigating these grievances reduces mobilisation and recruitment for the recurrence of conflict. The authors highlight the Liberian Truth Commission which explicitly set out to deal with historic grievances amongst people as a case study example. The authors conclude that their study supports the argument that conflict behaviour is mainly driven by grievances.

6. Mediation

Blattman, C., Hartman, A. C., & Blair, R. A. (2014). How to Promote Order and Property Rights under Weak Rule of Law? An Experiment in Changing Dispute Resolution Behavior through Community Education. *American Political Science Review*, 108(1), 100–120. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000543>

This mixed method study, using experimental, survey and qualitative methods, looking at ADR training in Liberia found that a year later, those towns where this training took place had lower violence and higher resolution of land disputes. The ADR training focused on skills and practices for how to resolve disputes and looked to promote norms as to how people should resolve disputes. The authors argue that though the study is short-term they see positive longer-term effects but that they also see worrying unintended consequences. The consequences were an increase in use of illegal extrajudicial punishments, and an increase in various non-violent disputes especially youth-elder disputes. They note that the non-violent dispute increase was not statistically significant. The study does not find an association between the ADR training and other forms of conflict (i.e. non-land-related conflict).

7. Vocational education and public education

Peres, M. F. T., Ruotti, C., Vicentin, D., Almeida, J. F. de, & Freitas, T. V. (2010). Avaliação de programas de prevenção da violência: Um estudo de caso no Brasil. *Revista Brasileira Adolescência e Conflitualidade*, 2, Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.17921/2176-5626.n2p%p>

This quasi-experimental study found that a youth violence prevention programme did not reduce the level of violence in the neighbourhood of Sao Paulo, Brazil where the study was undertaken. The programme itself was composed of vocational courses for socially vulnerable adolescents, and a public socio-educational programme. The authors attribute the failure of the programme to structural problems, mainly the combination of socio-economic needs and the consolidation of illegal practices such as trafficking.

8. Media and communication

Bilali, R., & Vollhardt, J. R. (2013). Priming effects of a reconciliation radio drama on historical perspective-taking in the aftermath of mass violence in Rwanda. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(1), 144–151. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.08.011>

This experimental study in Rwanda, looking at the priming effect of a radio drama designed to increase perspective-taking, found that participants engaged in more perspective-taking, less competitive victimhood, and less mistrust. The study built on a fictional radio drama that has been broadcast in Rwanda since 2004 that is expressly focused on conflict prevention and promoting reconciliation after the genocide. The study could not create treatment and control groups and so instead primed participants using the voice of a character from the show. While the study was able to find improvements in social psychological measures linked with violence, the study did not investigate a direct link between the priming of the drama and measures of conflict or violence.

Bilali, R., Vollhardt, J. R., & Rarick, J. R. D. (2016). Assessing the Impact of a Media-based Intervention to Prevent Intergroup Violence and Promote Positive Intergroup Relations in Burundi. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 26(3), 221–235. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2246>

This quasi-experimental study in Burundi looking at the impact of a violence prevention and intergroup reconciliation media intervention (i.e. a radio drama), found a positive effect in a number of social psychological outcomes. The study notes that there was no effect in relation to obedience towards leaders and historical perspective taking. Also, the effect on active bystandership (i.e. speaking out against or standing up to outgroup aggression) was mixed. While the study found a positive effect in relation to psychological outcomes and attitudes that are related to conflict and violence, the study did not directly measure changes in frequency and severity of conflict or violence (despite the study's title emphasis on preventing violence).

Bilali, R., & Vollhardt, J. R. (2015). Do Mass Media Interventions Effectively Promote Peace in Contexts of Ongoing Violence? Evidence From Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

***Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 21(4), 604–620.**
<https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000124>

This experimental study in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), looking at the impact of a media-based intervention (i.e. a radio drama), found mixed effects in relation to psychological outcomes. On the one hand, the intervention increased the perception of similarities between the ingroup's suffering and other group's suffering ('inclusive victim consciousness'), reduced the belief that the ingroup's suffering is unique ('exclusive victim consciousness') and reduced social distance (i.e. the disinclination towards intergroup relationships). On the other hand, the intervention increased support for obedience towards leaders, and reduced the belief that cross-group discussions can lessen community problems. The authors argue that the mixed results found in this study, compared to largely positive results in similar studies, highlight how strategies that are effective in post-conflict situations may be less effective in contexts of ongoing violence.

9. Humanitarian interventions

Narang, N. (2014). Humanitarian Assistance and the Duration of Peace after Civil War. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(2), 446–460. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613001382>

This statistical analysis study looked at non-military humanitarian aid finding that post-conflict states that received higher levels of humanitarian aid experienced shorter spells of peace. The author argues that though humanitarian aid is intended to be politically neutral and distributed according to need, aid ends up disproportionately benefitting the losing party. This in turn can create a 'revisionist party' through changing the power distribution towards the loser and creating incentives to renegotiate the conflict settlement rather than accept the post-conflict status quo. This is a more pronounced situation in some scenarios of conflict resolution: humanitarian aid is most likely to reduce peace duration where the conflict has ended with a decisive victory, either by the government or the rebel forces, and least likely to impact on peace duration where the civil war ended without a decisive victory, such as with a truce, settlement, or stalemate.

10. Environmental interventions

Ide, T. (2019). The Impact of Environmental Cooperation on Peacemaking: Definitions, Mechanisms, and Empirical Evidence. *International Studies Review*, 21(3), 327–346.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy014>

This non-systematic literature review study on environmental peacebuilding finds that in certain situations, different nonstate communities have worked together to manage shared water

resources and this could contribute to prevent the violence in related conflicts. The author argues that there are key contextual factors associated with this effect: absence of recent and intense violence, a local tradition of cooperation, and availability of broadly accepted local knowledge on the environment. This is based on case study analysis from Yemen (Taher et al., 2012), DRC (Burt & Keiru, 2011), Ethiopia (Bogale & Korf, 2007), and Kenya (Adano et al., 2012) and overall, the evidence is far from conclusive.

Ide, T., & Detges, A. (2018). International Water Cooperation and Environmental Peacemaking. *Global Environmental Politics*, 18(4), 63–84.

https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00478

This statistical analysis study looking at the positive water-related interactions between states found that this was related to more peaceful interstate relations ten years later. The study looked at state pair (i.e. a dyad of two states) data between 1956–2006. The authors conclude that water cooperation can make peaceful interstate relations more likely, and this is true with state pairs that are not already in conflict with each other.

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