



## Helpdesk Research Report

# Building social cohesion in post-conflict situations

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## Question

*What are the approaches being taken by donors, CSOs and others to build social cohesion in post-conflict societies? Are there any measures being put in place during conflict (as building blocks to peace processes)? How effective are these approaches? What are the pros and cons?*

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## 1. Overview

This report identifies measures taken by donor agencies and other non-state actors to build social cohesion in post-conflict societies<sup>1</sup>. The approaches covered in this report include community-driven development, job creation, social protection and education.<sup>2</sup> Given that social cohesion is considered closely linked to state-building and national identity formation, this is a sensitive area where the legitimacy of donor engagement is contested (Brown, 2013). Legitimacy aside, experts argue there is a

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the Council of Europe's definition of social cohesion: 'the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members – minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation – to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members.'

<sup>2</sup> Interventions falling under the rubric of restorative justice and reconciliation will be covered in a separate, forthcoming helpdesk report.

limit to what external actors can do to build social cohesion, since building social cohesion relies on endogenous processes of building trust and inter-group relations (Brown, 2013; Fearon et al., 2009).

The literature also highlights the difficulties of measuring the impact of aid interventions on social cohesion. These commonly include lack of baseline data, the absence of a control or comparison group (i.e. randomised control trials), the difficulty of measuring intangible social outcomes, and few relevant indicators (King, 2013a; for last point Slater and Mallet, 2013). A widely used World Bank instrument measures social capital across six dimensions: groups and networks; trust and solidarity; collective action and cooperation; social cohesion and inclusion; information and communication; and empowerment and political action (King, 2013a). Overall, many experts argue more empirical evidence is needed in this area (ODI, 2013; Wietzke 2014).

Whilst in theory there are strong links between social cohesion and community-driven development, job creation, social protection and education, in practice there is very little rigorous empirical evidence to verify these links. More specifically, the literature highlights that:

- **Community-driven development (CDD) programmes** promote social cohesion through community participation in decision-making, bringing divided people together, and addressing community needs (King, 2013b).
- **Evidence of the impact of CDD programmes on social cohesion is mixed:** Some studies show positive effects on some aspects of social cohesion (Fearon et al., 2009; Taniguchi, 2012); others show some positive effects and/or no adverse effects (King, 2013a; Beath et al., 2012); but some show negative effects (King, 2013a). Two multi-country studies both found very mixed effects (King, 2013; Mallet & Slater, 2013). Programme design and context significantly determine impact (Mallet & Slater, 2013).
- **It is widely assumed that access to jobs improves social cohesion** (WB, 2013; ODI, 2013; Walton, 2010). This is because jobs can reduce tensions stemming from unemployment; improve people's economic condition; and enable different groups to interact (UN 2008; OECD, 2011; WB, 2013).
- **Evidence of the impact of job creation programmes on social cohesion is extremely limited:** The literature shows correlation between jobs and some outcomes typically associated with social cohesion, such as social well-being, but evidence of how individual experiences translate into interactions between groups is limited (Wietzke, 2014). Some of the literature highlights the negative impact jobs can have on social cohesion – for example, when labour markets are divided along group lines (ODI, 2013; WB, 2013; Wietzke, 2014).
- **Social protection may promote social cohesion** where it can reduce poverty, enhance the income security of vulnerable people, improve access to basic services and establish legal entitlements for previously excluded groups (Babajanian, 2012; Slater & Holmes, 2012).
- **Empirical evidence of the impact of social protection on social cohesion is limited:** Different social protection modalities (cash transfers, conditional grants, social insurance, etc.) could improve social cohesion, but problems could arise if programmes are not designed carefully. For example, if targeting is carried out on ethnic lines, or weakened by corruption/mismanagement, this can exacerbate tensions (Babajanian, 2012; Slater & Holmes, 2012).
- **Education can be either a positive or negative influence on social cohesion:** Education reform can be designed to improve social cohesion but there is little evidence of positive impact. Examples include multilingual education systems (Aturupane & Wikramanayake, 2011); Marc et

al., 2012); adopting a sector wide approach and addressing human rights and inequality (WB, 2013); and taking a holistic approach to curriculum design (Roberts-Schweitzer et al., 2006; UNICEF, 2014).

- **Civil society can play a role in peace building:** However, it can also have a negative effect, particularly where it reflects societal divisions (Doust, 2009; de Weijer & Kilnes, 2012). Evidence of impact of donor-supported interventions by civil society to promote social cohesion is lacking. However, there are guidelines for donors seeking to support civil society in this role (Forster and Mattner, 2006; Oxfam, 2013). Key points include using a broad definition of civil society, understanding the context, and ensuring local ownership.

## 2. Community-Driven Development

Community-driven development (CDD) programmes are an established instrument for support to post-conflict societies (Fearon et al., 2009). CDD is typically used to promote social cohesion alongside reducing poverty and improving service delivery/public goods provision. CDD arguably improves social cohesion because it supports community participation in decision-making, brings divided people together and addresses priority community needs (King, 2013b). However, studies of the impact of CDD programmes on social cohesion paint a very mixed picture.

An IRC community reconstruction programme in northern Liberia attempted to build democratic, community-level institutions to make and implement decisions about local public goods. Villages were randomly exposed to the programme. A study found that treatment villages showed a higher level of social cooperation, as demonstrated by people's anonymous contributions to collective projects<sup>3</sup>, than control villages (Fearon et al., 2009). What is noteworthy about this evidence is that it is based on a randomised control trial, and the change (increase in social cohesion) happened after only brief exposure to participatory processes<sup>4</sup> – suggesting that post-conflict development aid can have a measurable impact on social cohesion without fundamental changes to the structure of economic or other macro-level indicators (Fearon et al., 2009).

Similar positive findings were seen in survey results of a CDD programme in Southern Mindanao, the Philippines. The ARMM Social Fund for Peace and Development Project (ASFPDP) targeted 358 villages over an eight-year period, providing basic social services and improving income generation opportunities. It was found to be effective in building social capital within and outside the community through collaborative work, releasing tensions among people, and creating a sense of security and peace (Taniguchi, 2012). Moreover, even after the project ended, people were still interacting with each other, using the facilities, undertaking operations and maintenance, and sharing benefits. But the study warned that this social capital could be lost if regional and local governments did not provide the services people needed.

Analysis of results from the Kokoyah Millennium Villages Project (KMVP), a community-based and community-led development initiative in Liberia, found that it increased social cohesion without any adverse effects (King, 2013a). Numerous interventions were carried out under KMVP focused on

<sup>3</sup> Researchers designed a public goods game, in which 24 randomly selected individuals in each community were given money, and asked to decide how much they wanted to contribute anonymously to a public goods project, and how much they wanted to keep for themselves.

<sup>4</sup> Communities formed Community Development Committees which were charged with selecting and implementing a quick-impact project followed by a larger development project, and maintaining these. Committee members were elected from all voting-age adults in the village.

agriculture, health, water and sanitation, education, local governance and community development. The increase in social cohesion took place in spite of the fact that perceptions of welfare as a result of the project had not improved. However, the research also suggested that social cohesion was already high at baseline. A randomised evaluation of the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan showed no impacts on social stability, on specific measures of community trust or solidarity, or on the prevalence of village disputes or tribal feuds (Beath et al., 2012).

There are cases of CDD initiatives that have created or exacerbated tensions. One study of social funds in Zimbabwe and Malawi found substantial negative effects on individuals' perceptions of intergroup relations (King, 2013a). In Cameroon, efforts to decentralise development programmes to give local communities control over development of their resources led to the emergence of deep divisions in the local population (King, 2013a).

A critical review of CDD programmes in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Aceh (Indonesia), Liberia and Sierra Leone concluded that the CDD approach was better at generating the more tangible economic outcomes than social outcomes related to governance and social cohesion (King, 2013b). In relation to social cohesion, it found measurable positive impacts only in Liberia; the rest showed no positive effects, while Aceh showed an adverse effect – people in treatment communities were less accepting of ex-combatants than those in control communities. It recommended setting realistic goals, rethinking programme design and carrying out research comparing CDD approaches with others.

Another study in the same year looked at an even wider range of CDD programmes<sup>5</sup> all in conflict-affected contexts (Mallett & Slater, 2013). Its findings were also mixed: some programmes had positive effects on social cohesion, others had no effect, while some were found to inadvertently accentuate violence, especially in areas with competition over project resources. The study identified two factors as accounting for the mixed findings: one, programme design and, two, context. '*How* something is designed and implemented may be just as, if not more important, than *what* it is that is being implemented in the first place' (Mallett & Slater, 2013: p. 8). Context includes pre-existing levels of social cohesion, the extent to which community relations were damaged by conflict, and motives and strategies of insurgent groups. The study concluded that claims about the 'transformational effects' of CDD programmes should be treated with caution, and stressed the need for more rigorous research to understand how and why CDD programmes produce particular effects.

### 3. Jobs

There is wide recognition in the literature of the link between access to jobs and social cohesion (UN, 2008; OECD, 2011; WB, 2013). This is based on the assumption that giving people jobs reduces the tensions and frustrations stemming from unemployment, improves people's economic condition, and enables different groups to interact – all of which promotes stability and social cohesion. However, while there is evidence from fragile states that unemployment is a driver of instability (ODI, 2013), evidence of the reverse - impact of large-scale employment creation programmes on stability – is extremely limited (WB, 2013; ODI, 2013; Walton, 2010).

A review of international evidence on the link between jobs and individual well-being and behaviours (Wietzke, 2014) found that jobs emerge as correlates of a range of outcomes typically associated with social cohesion, such as subjective well-being and social associations. However, the evidence is much more limited on how individual work-related experiences translate into interactions between groups at

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<sup>5</sup> Thirteen programmes, including some of those covered in King 2013b.

an aggregate level – typically the transition from individual experiences to social relations will be mediated by a host of wider social and economic influences (Wietzke, 2014). A second caveat was the relatively tentative nature of the evidence that was available.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, a review of evidence that job creation programmes for youth lead to a reduction in armed violence found that ‘both the theoretical and empirical cases for using youth employment programmes as a stand-alone tool for reducing violent conflict are extremely weak’ (Walton, 2010: p. 1).

Public works (cash for work or CfW) programmes have been supported by donor agencies in fragile and post-conflict settings. Evidence on the application of these is thin, but one evaluation of a major public works programme in Sri Lanka<sup>7</sup> focused on the social cohesion aspects (Andrews & Kryeziu, 2013). It found the most noted outcome was that social capital was built through public works. Features of the programme, such as community gatherings for PW projects, working alongside others, sharing meals and working as groups, had all contributed towards promoting a sense of belonging among people newly resettled (post-conflict) in their villages.

Some of the literature highlights the link between jobs and social cohesion can be negative as well as positive (ODI, 2013; WB, 2013; Wietzke, 2014). Denial of access to jobs<sup>8</sup>, limited opportunities for growth, capture of particular jobs by particular groups – these are all factors that can have a profound negative impact on social cohesion (WB 2013). This points to the need to look not simply at job creation (as in numbers of jobs or access to a job) but also at: opportunities to access particular jobs; distribution of skills and jobs within society; labour policies/practices that exclude/include different groups; and job characteristics (e.g. if these empower people, if there are opportunities for growth). Studies have shown some positive correlation between jobs with perceived autonomous, cognitive and creative attributes and civic engagement in all but low-income countries. Surveys in China, Colombia and Egypt in 2012 found workers who perceived their jobs as having these attributes were more likely to report helping other people (WB, 2013).

Overall, the literature stresses the need for studies providing empirical evidence on the impacts of job creation on poverty and stability in fragile states (ODI, 2013; Wietzke 2014). It also calls for the focus to be not just on numbers of jobs created but also distribution of jobs, and on medium- and long-term as well as immediate impacts (ODI, 2013).

## 4. Social Protection

As with CDD and job creation, so social protection is something that can potentially make a positive contribution to strengthening social cohesion (Babajanian, 2012; Slater & Holmes, 2012). Social cohesion entails accepting differences in society, but ensuring equity so that differences and disparities do not undermine stability and cause conflict. Social protection is thought to address the distributional aspect of social cohesion: it can reduce poverty, enhance income security of vulnerable people, improve their access to basic services and establish legal entitlements for previously excluded groups (Babajanian, 2012). Assumptions about the role social protection can play in creating social cohesion are ‘largely

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Rigorous analysis of the social interactions to which many of the positive effects of work are attributed is notoriously difficult because of the potential selection problems and other contextual influences involved.’ (Wietzke, 2014: p. 26).

<sup>7</sup> Emergency Northern Recovery Project (ENREP).

<sup>8</sup> Social unrest in Tunisia in 2011 was reported to stem from grievances related to jobs rather than from unemployment: ‘Protestors aren’t asking the government to find them a job, but denouncing the lack of transparency and justice in the labour market’. *Le Monde*, cited in WB, 2013.

based on arguments about its state-controlled redistributive role and the levels of social unrest in the absence of social protection' (Slater & Holmes, 2012: p. 9).

But again, there is little empirical evidence on the impacts or mechanisms by which social protection achieves better social cohesion outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2012; Slater & Holmes, 2012). There is limited evidence of the ways in which different social protection modalities (e.g. cash transfers, social insurance, conditional transfers, microfinance) impact social cohesion.

In low-income and fragile countries, delivery of any kind of social protection will face challenges related to capacity and corruption. Targeting, benefit value and coverage will determine the effectiveness of social protection transfers (Babajanian, 2012). This, in turn, will determine their impact on social inclusion, access to services, poverty reduction and other aspects that lead to social cohesion. One review notes that the provision of income support alone will not uproot social exclusion: 'policies must address structural factors that generate deprivation and vulnerability' (Babajanian, 2012; p. 5).

The literature stresses that, if not carried out properly, social protection initiatives can actually undermine social cohesion (Slater & Holmes, 2012). When targeting in fragile states is carried out on the basis of ethnic or other group identity, or when targeting is weak because of corruption and/or mismanagement, this can fuel resentment and exacerbate tensions between different groups. In the context of Brazil's Conditional Cash Transfer Program it was argued: 'there is the risk that benefitting Indigenous populations with cash transfers as opposed to poor non-Indigenous populations could create conflict and social tensions' (Slater & Holmes, 2012). This highlights the need to pay attention to design and implementation of social protection programmes (Babajanian, 2012).

## 5. Education

The education system has been identified as a contributory factor in many conflict situations: in Sri Lanka when the medium of instruction in schools was changed; in Rwanda where ethnic quotas were applied; in Burundi, where education provision was skewed along ethnic lines (Carpenter et al., 2012). In all these examples the education system exacerbated social inequalities. However, education can also promote social cohesion in multiple ways: by exposing students to those from different groups (e.g. ethnic, religious, linguistic); teaching them values of tolerance; forging national identity; recognizing and giving space to different cultures (diversity); providing equal opportunities to all and thus reducing grievances around inequalities; and teaching young people the basic principles of good citizenship and the consequences of not adhering to those principles (Aturupane & Wikramanayake, 2011; Carpenter et al., 2012).

Yet again, while the theoretical link between education and social cohesion is established, empirical evidence is limited. The available literature tends to describe educational *reforms* carried out with the aim of building social cohesion rather than assess their impact (Robert-Schweitzer et al., 2006; UNICEF, 2014) or look at donor interventions per se.

Denial of mother tongue education for (minority) groups has frequently been a source of anger and division. Multi-lingual education has long been practised in Canada, Switzerland and Spain. In Latin America, education authorities in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico developed and implemented bilingual programmes with suitable education materials, teaching techniques and trained teachers (Marc et al., 2012). Papua New Guinea introduced a programme in 1993 for native language instruction in the first year of school, which by 2001 had expanded to include 369 indigenous languages (Marc et al., 2012). As well as increasing enrolment and reducing dropout rates, the initiative improved social cohesion by

giving children a sense of belonging to the multitude of tribal groups that make up the population. A school in Israel, in a district characterised by Arab-Jewish hostility, pioneered an 'education for peace' programme that successfully integrated children from the two communities (Marc et al., 2012).

Post-conflict Rwanda has taken a sector wide approach to reforming the education system – teacher recruitment and training, establishment of new schools, decentralization of education to district governments, curriculum and textbook reform and so on (WB, 2013: p. 19). While nationally led, many initiatives received financial and/or technical assistance from development partners. Noteworthy about the reform process in Rwanda is that it explicitly addressed issues of equity, inclusion and human rights in education policies and programmes.

While there is limited evidence of the impact of donor interventions, the literature does provide guidance for development practitioners on the kinds of reforms and measures needed to ensure that the education system works in a positive way to promote social cohesion. Critical areas are textbooks, curricula, teacher training and ensuring access for all (Roberts-Schweitzer et al., 2006; UNICEF, 2014). There is stress on the need to take a holistic approach – carrying out reform in only one or a few of these areas will not deliver social cohesion (ibid.).

## 6. Role of Civil Society

The potential role of civil society in peace building is acknowledged in the literature (Forster and Mattner, 2006; Doust, 2009). One study identifies restoration of social trust as the most pressing task for fragile states, and civil society organizations can play a role in this by building social cohesion, facilitating dialogue, combating impunity and fostering social stability (Doust, 2009). However, it adds that: 'Actions by external actors are insufficient to create or rebuild a social contract: the process must be locally led with institutions and trust-building rooted in society.' (Doust, 2009: p. 11). The literature also notes that civil society can have a negative effect on social cohesion, particularly when it reflects societal divisions (Doust, 2009; de Weijer & Kilnes, 2012).

Little evidence was found of impact of donor-supported interventions by civil society to promote social cohesion. However, there are guidelines for donors seeking to support civil society in this role. Key points include: a broad conception of civil society should be taken, going beyond NGOs and formally constituted organizations; interventions should be based on rigorous analysis of the context, including civil society itself; local ownership and partner-led programme identification are critical (Forster and Mattner, 2006; Oxfam, 2013).

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## Key websites

- Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC): <http://www.securelivelihoods.org/>
- World Bank - Social Cohesion and Violence Prevention: <http://go.worldbank.org/RVC6BBW0F0>

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## About this report

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