

Fast-Track Institution Building in Conflict-Affected Countries? Insights from Recent Field Experiments

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Summary. — This paper synthesizes evidence from four recent “community-driven development” field experiments undertaken in countries affected by violent conflict and assesses prospects for “fast-track” institution building. Conflict-affected environments are presumed to be settings that combine extraordinary need and opportunity for building institutions. The substantive and methodological consistency of the field experiments (Afghanistan, DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) allows us to derive general conclusions about attempts at local institution building in conflict-affected contexts. The evidence tells us that CDD programs are far from “proven impact” interventions. We discuss reasons for the limited effects, with implications for policy and further research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community-driven development (CDD) is a response to perceived failures of top-down, donor-driven development and reconstruction strategies in alleviating poverty (Pritchett & Woolcock, 2003). CDD is an approach said to “empower local community groups, including local governments, by giving direct control to the community over planning decisions and investment resources through a process that emphasizes participatory planning and accountability” (Mansuri & Rao, 2012; World Bank Social Development Department, 2006, p. 6). Many goals are assigned to CDD projects including improving service delivery and socio-economic wellbeing, as well as governance and social cohesion at the community level. In conflict-affected contexts, with the belief that there exist both a need and opportunity for institution building, these latter goals take on particular salience. To wit, CDD is a central component in international development assistance to conflict-affected states. The World Bank is the largest supporter of CDD projects, currently sponsoring more than 400 projects in 94 countries (Wong, 2012, p. iv) and spending upwards of \$54 billion on CDD during 1999–2011, including over \$7.8 billion in 2010 alone (Mansuri & Rao, 2012, p. 44). This includes 167 CDD projects in 29 conflict-affected and fragile states from 2000 to 2010 (de Regt, Majumdar, & Singh, 2013, p. 5). Bilateral assistance from the United States to “community participation and development” projects from 2000 to 2011 amounts to \$4.3 billion dollars with the top three recipients, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, all conflict-affected states, while for the UK, such bilateral assistance amounts to about half a billion dollars with the top three recipients being Nigeria, India, and Bangladesh (figures from aiddata.org). Many other multilateral and bilateral donors also fund CDD.

Despite rhetorical and financial commitments, the proposition that CDD inputs can generate lasting and transferable change in attitudes and behavior is much debated. Social and institutional changes are typically described as slow moving. To address this debate, this paper synthesizes evidence from four CDD field experiments displaying important methodological and programmatic similarities and recently undertaken in countries affected by violent conflict: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, and Sierra

Leone. Using an approach modeled on the idea of “best evidence synthesis” (Slavin, 1995), we assess prospects for externally driven¹ “fast-track” institution building, meaning the strengthening of local capacities for inclusive problem solving and collective action over the span of a few years. We find that although the CDD programs generally established successful community-level organizations, broadening the base of participation in local development and providing an opportunity for community members to meaningfully work together to achieve community goals, the CDD programs in Afghanistan, DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone largely failed to increase the capacity for collective action in a way that is durable and transferable beyond the CDD interventions.

The first section provides background on CDD and positions it theoretically within literature on conflict and institution building. This section also lays out our meaning of fast-track institution building and the two hypotheses we test. The second section explains the cases we use and the review methods. The third section presents our findings. The fourth opens a discussion of the findings, focusing on motivating assumptions behind CDD programs, program design issues, and methodological measurement factors. The conclusion discusses ways forward for research and programing.²

2. CDD, CONFLICT, AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

CDD programs are a mainstay in broader experimentation in recent decades with decentralized and participatory institutions for development (Pritchett & Woolcock, 2003). CDD projects include institution building, planning, and project execution components. They typically begin with community-level mobilization and training by facilitators in inclusive and transparent decision-making, leading to the election of community councils that devise local development plans. This stage is followed by

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block grants spent on sub-projects chosen by the community in processes consistent with their training and using their new institutions. Finally, the community works through the community councils and with the assistance of facilitators to execute the sub-project, usually a social infrastructure project. The idea is that these participatory community processes be carried over into other activities at the end of the CDD program. In discussing CDD as institution building, we thus refer to institutionalizing norms of good governance and social cohesion widely thought important to inclusive problem solving and collective action. CDD is “fast-track” institution building in that programs try to achieve these goals in only a few years.

Whether participatory approaches may improve welfare is debated in the literature (Mansuri & Rao, 2012; Speer, 2012). Bardhan and Mookherjee (2005, 2006) propose that only when local elite capture can be tamed will such institutions enhance welfare broadly as opposed to contributing to rent seeking. Khwaja (2004) suggests that boosting participation only increases welfare when community members have technical capacity to handle projects. In theory, CDD programs can overcome challenges of capture and low capacity through their emphasis on inclusiveness and extended facilitation, although analyses by Ensminger (2010), Fritzen (2007), Gugerty and Kremer (2002), and Platteau and Gaspart (2003) suggest difficulties of doing so in practice.

In conflict-affected contexts, CDD is a convenient mechanism for service delivery in areas where the administrative reach of state institutions is limited (de Regt et al., 2013; DFID, 2010; USAID, 2007; World Bank, 2006), where donors are concerned that central governments are ineffective or non-responsive, or as a way to avert leakage as funds trickle down through levels of government (Li, 2011). These pragmatic motivations help to explain the appeal of CDD as a mechanism for service delivery in countries such as Afghanistan, DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Beyond service delivery, donors and implementing agencies emphasize institution building as a goal for CDD programs in conflict-affected areas. This includes fostering social cohesion (International Rescue Committee, n.d.; USAID, 2007; World Bank, 2006), “building local governance capacity” (de Regt et al., 2013; DFID, 2010, p. 29), and leaving behind “stable, integrated communities that can identify and prioritize problems, manage conflict constructively, tap into local and external resources to solve problems, and incubate future local leaders and democratic principles” (USAID, 2007, pp. 20–21). The very names of CDD projects speak to desired institutional effects: the programs reviewed below include the *Tuongane* project in DRC, Kiswahili for “let’s unite”; *GoBifo* in Sierra Leone, Krio for “move forward” or “forward march”; and the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan. CDD programs vary in the emphasis they place on these different economic, institutional, and social goals.

The view that there exist both a *need* and *opportunity* for institution building after violent conflict has motivated donors and agencies in their CDD programing in conflict-affected areas (DFID, 2010; USAID, 2007; World Bank, 2006). The attention to *need* comes in part from the recognition of a tight association between poverty and conflict around the world (Collier, 2007; Hegre & Sambanis, 2006). Recent policies toward conflict-affected countries have built on the idea that, above and beyond material consequences, violent civil conflict disrupts social institutions. The World Bank’s seminal *Breaking the Conflict Trap* noted that civil wars “can have the effect of switching behavior from an equilibrium in which there is an expectation of honesty to one in which there is an expectation of corruption” and that,

Once a country has had a civil war it is far more at risk of further war. This is partly because war leaves the society divided and embittered, and partly because war creates interests that favor continued violence and criminality (Collier et al., 2003, p. 22).

This proposition is consistent with theoretical analyses of civil conflict that emphasize dynamics of social polarization due to “security dilemmas” (Posen, 1993; Snyder & Jervis, 1999). Theoretically, by witnessing others’ violent acts, looting, or otherwise anti-social behaviors, whether such behaviors are undertaken for venal or justifiably self-preserving reasons, one’s estimation of the trustworthiness of others will be decreased. This undermines people’s willingness to engage in trust-based transactions, whether investments in private co-production or contributions to community or public projects.

Other donor and implementing agencies echo this need logic when motivating CDD programs in conflict-affected contexts. McBride and D’Onofrio note that in the aftermath of conflict, “local institutions may be weak or non-existent; experience with good governance is often absent; communities may be less willing to work together” (2008, p. 1). In their publication about CDD, Cliffe, Guggenheim, and Kostner describe the

impact of violent conflict on a country’s economy and society [as] profound and multiple. It can be as highly visible as smashed buildings, maimed civilians, and burst water mains. But the impact can also be invisible, such as happens with the collapse of state institutions, the spread of mistrust in government, and pervasive fear. In both cases, needs are immense and urgent (2003, p. 1).

A USAID program guide for CDD in conflict-affected settings proposes that “[o]ne of the costs of internal violent conflict is the loss of community cohesion” (2007, p. 8). Documentation for post-war programing in Liberia from the International Rescue Committee puts forth that “conflict has broken community and familial relationships and laid waste to the trust in institutions deemed essential to the recovery process” (International Rescue Committee, 2006c, p. 1–2). Likewise, in documentation for their *Tuongane* CDD project, the International Rescue Committee described people in eastern DRC as

disempowered, marginalised, and impoverished... [with an] absence of viable local government and related services and infrastructure... The result is isolated, fragile communities among some of the poorest in the world, who lack basic services and the social cohesion and capital necessary to mobilise local human and physical resources to meet their own needs (International Rescue Committee, 2006a, p. 5).

In both scholarly and policy circles, these social and institutional impacts of violent conflict are often asserted and assumed rather than demonstrated and specified.

At the same time, the policy literature proposes that there may be a silver lining: conflict’s disruption of social institutions creates an *opportunity* for institutional reconstruction. The USAID program guide for CDD in conflict-affected settings suggests that the “breakdown of systems in conflict settings creates an opportunity to revisit negative social dynamics, such as domination by elites or a particular ethnic or religious group, and to foster healthier dynamics” (2007, p. 6). A World Bank policy report refers to “new ‘development spaces’” that arise as conflict unsettles the status quo (2006, p. 12). In their documentation for programs in Liberia and the DRC, the International Rescue Committee highlights situations of “huge suffering but also huge potential” and the

chance to “seize this window of opportunity to re-enforce the peace” (International Rescue Committee, 2006a; International Rescue Committee, 2006b). Some suggest that the opportunity for shifting gender roles may be particularly great (Fuest, 2008). This optimism is consistent with seminal work in social science that has emphasized the importance of crises (Ostrom, 1990, pp. 207–8) or critical junctures (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012) as moments of institutional change as well as important scholarship highlighting moments of “social creativity” following dramatic crises such as wars (Cramer, 2006, pp. 40–44, 279) and the possibility of a “phoenix factor” whereby countries devastated by war exhibit a potential to perform at a higher level economically than would be the case in the absence of war (Organski & Kugler, 1977).

CDD programs would seem to be perfectly designed to address such need and seize such windows of opportunity for reconstructing local social institutions. While there was no single originating theory on which post-conflict CDD programs were based, international donors and agencies engaged in CDD programs have come to agree on a common set of motivating propositions that link “inputs” to institutional “outputs” and desired “outcomes” (Cliffe, Guggenheim, & Kostner, 2003; DFID, 2010; International Development Association, 2009; McBride & D’Onofrio, 2008; USAID, 2007; World Bank, 2006). As described above, key inputs include facilitation, establishment, or recognition of inclusive community organizations for deciding development priorities, and administration of block grants to finance development projects chosen through the organization. The institutional outputs include broad-based participation in the process, potentially shifting existing power arrangements to be more inclusive, providing community members with a (presumably positive) experience of working together, and providing community members a sense of ownership over local development activities and therefore an inducement to hold accountable those implementing development projects. These propositions echo what Vajja and White (2008) refer to as the “hippy” model of participatory development and what Mansuri and Rao refer to as “the exercise of voice and choice” (2012, p. 15). The institutional outputs come alongside material outputs—typically social infrastructure such as school facilities, water, and sanitation projects, irrigation projects, roads, and community centers. These “quick wins” are intended to show citizens the tangible benefits of peace and the potential that might arise when community members work together.

Given these inputs and outputs, the ultimate hoped-for institutional outcome is a sustainable and transferable boost to capacities for cooperative problem solving and collective action. The “learning by doing” and “demonstration effects” are expected to generate sustained patterns of cooperative problem solving. In other words, by participating in effective collective action, community-members should be better prepared for future collective action and willing to draw on these social and institutional models for non-CDD activity. Casey et al. interpret the CDD process as one that reduces the marginal cost of public goods provision through block grants (financial subsidies) and reduces the fixed costs of collective action by requiring participation and endeavoring to inculcate democratic norms. The “learning by doing” idea is that through the resultant increase in community participation, alongside the establishment of village-level development and decision-making institutions (Village Development Councils, Plans, and Bank Accounts), future, post-project, collective action will be less costly to implement (2012a, pp.1764–7).

In conflict-affected areas, the CDD policy literature posits that these institutional outcomes can help build peace. Fearon et al. cite World Bank policy documents proposing that “by improving public goods provision or enhancing cohesion, [CDD] may reduce the risk of renewed conflict by lessening local grievances or facilitating economic development, which may in turn reduce the incentives to participation in violence” (Fearon, Humphreys, & Weinstein, 2008, p. 4). We can sum up these arguments with the following general hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. The establishment and operation of community level CDD organizations broadens the base of participation in local development decision-making, providing the community a novel opportunity to work together equitably and cooperatively to generate material improvements that meet collectively agreed-upon needs.

Hypothesis 2. CDD generates learning-by-doing or demonstration effects that increase a community’s capacity for inclusive and cooperative problem solving and collective action in a manner that is durable and transferable.

The idea that brief exposure to CDD inputs can generate lasting and transferable change in attitudes and behavior, what we term “fast-track institution building,” is a debated proposition. In their discussion of the motivations for the *Tuangane* CDD project in the DRC, Humphreys et al. note that “the basic principle behind [CDD]. . . runs largely counter to classic accounts of the determinants of social behavior that emphasize structural and slow moving features” (2012, p. 19). Such accounts include work by Miguel (2004), Putnam (1993), North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009), and Nunn (2008) on how current societal patterns of cooperation are the accumulated product of major historical forces over decades if not centuries. Mansuri and Rao question the idea that that there can be a straightforward relationship between the types of inputs that CDD delivers and institutional change: “It is instead likely to proceed along a punctuated equilibrium where long periods of seeming quietude are followed by intense, and often turbulent, change” (2012, p. 12). Vajja and White’s review of CDD programs in Malawi and Zambia lead them to question the idealized vision that “all community members enter the decision-making sphere on an equal footing, and can agree on a common interest without intra-community conflicts” (2008, p. 1148). Generalizing these critiques, one might ask whether the ideal-type theory of change that has motivated CDD programming in conflict-affected areas underplays the radicalness of institutional change (Mansuri & Rao, 2012, pp. 98–9).

The theoretical literature also raises the possibility of adverse consequences. The establishment of CDD in places where customary institutions are already in place may increase the number of decision-makers, possibly creating conflict or confusion over the distribution of responsibilities and increasing the number of actors empowered to extract rents (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2005; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013b; Shleifer & Vishny, 1993). The result may be *harmful* to community welfare.

Theory alone is inadequate for establishing whether the optimistic or pessimistic accounts are more plausible. What we need is rigorous empirical evidence on the effects of CDD programs on the collective action capacity of communities. A series of randomized field experiments over the past six years provides us with such evidence.

3. CASES AND METHODS

We focus on four randomized field experiments drawn from a systematic search of all CDD programs undertaken in conflict-affected countries.³ The studies cover phases of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program from 2007 to 2010 (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2012; Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013a; Beath et al., 2013b), the *Tuongane* program in eastern DRC from 2007 to 2010 (Humphreys, Sanchez de la Sierra, & van der Windt, 2012), Liberia's Community-Driven Reconstruction Program in Lofa County from 2006 to 2008 (Fearon, Humphreys, & Weinstein, 2011; Fearon et al., 2008), and Sierra Leone's *GoBifo* program implemented in one northern and one southern region from 2006 to 2009 (Casey, Glennerster, & Miguel, 2011; Casey, Glennerster, & Miguel, 2012a; Casey, Glennerster, & Miguel, 2012b). Sierra Leone and Liberia are post-conflict contexts, with peace agreements in 2002 and 2003 respectively. Many peacebuilding challenges remain, however, and both countries linger at the bottom of the human development index (177th and 174th of 186, respectively). In contrast, conflict is ongoing in Afghanistan and DRC; these two states are near the top of the failed state index (7th and 2nd) and the bottom (175th and 186th) of the human development index (Messner et al., 2013; UNDP, 2013). All four have hosted major international peacekeeping operations and multitudes of peacebuilding and development organizations.

The CDD interventions themselves are quite similar in terms of basic program components, as shown in Table 1. Nonetheless, there are some differences in the program designs, as

shown in Table 2. These include differences in funders, extent of government versus NGO administration, implementation timeframes, amounts invested, and the sizes of the target communities. Other differences that are more difficult to quantify include the types of projects that were barred from funding through the block grants, who exactly controlled the disbursement and application of block grants, and the nature of co-financing by communities that the program required. Another important qualification is that the manner of program implementation varied to some extent within each case. In Afghanistan, for instance, the 28 implementing NGOs had much discretion on programming in their respective areas (Maynard, 2007), while in Liberia one NGO (the International Rescue Committee) implemented all programs and did so in a relatively compact geographic area. Nevertheless, the programs and evaluation methods are much more consistent than those explored in other reviews (King, Samii, & Snilstveit, 2010; Mallett & Slater, 2013; Mansuri & Rao, 2012; Wong, 2012).

Table 3 shows project goals as culled from program documentation and the impact studies. From these quotes, it is clear that the programs sought to do more than create committees and deliver short-term services, and rather sought to effect social and institutional change. A critic might point out that tangible returns in the form of sub-projects appear to be the least ambitious goal of CDD. Increasing short-term socio-economic welfare is more ambitious. Effecting long-term social and institutional change, the goals upon which we focus here, is more ambitious still, and that ours may therefore be an unjust focus. Nonetheless, these quotes indicate that the "ideal type" theory that we are testing is not a straw man as it is in fact

Table 1. *Study and case characteristics*

Evaluation study	Case	Main program components	Program start date	Program end date	Evaluation endline date	Sample size
Beath, Christia, and Enikopolov (2012)	Afghanistan National Solidarity Program	Election of village development councils; block grants	September 2007	October 2010	May–October 2011	250 treated, 250 control
Humphreys et al. (2012)	DRC <i>Tuongane</i>	Election of village development councils; block grants	July 2007	June 2010	August 2010	280 treated, 280 control
Fearon et al. (2008)	Liberia CDR in Lofa Program	Election of village development councils; block grants	November 2006	March 2008	July–September 2008	41 treated, 41 control
Casey et al. (2011)	Sierra Leone <i>GoBifo</i>	Election of village development councils; block grants	January 2006	July 2009	May–June 2009 and October 2009	118 treated, 118 control

Table 2. *Distinguishing characteristics of cases*

Case	Primary funder	Implementer	Months of implementation	Total investment per capita ^a	Investment per capita/12 mos. ^a	Sizes of host "communities" ^b
Afghanistan National Solidarity Program	World Bank (International Development Association and Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund)	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development with 28 NGOs	37	\$20.40	\$6.62	1,044
DRC <i>Tuongane</i>	DFID	NGOs (IRC and CARE)	35	\$10.00	\$3.43	1,300
Liberia CDR	DFID	IRC	16	\$8.00	\$6.00	2,500
Sierra Leone <i>GoBifo</i>	Japan Social Development Fund (Government of Japan and World Bank)	Ministry of Internal Affairs, Local Government and Rural Development	43	\$16.00	\$4.47	300

^{a,b} See King (2013) footnotes 19 and 21 on source documentation for these figures, respectively.

Table 3. *Project Goals*

Project	Goals as per project documentation and/or evaluations
Afghanistan	“The key objective of NSP is to build, strengthen, and maintain Community Development Councils (CDCs) as effective institutions for local governance and social-economic development ” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, n.d.). Beath et al. add that the program “explicitly mentions promoting gender equality as one of the program’s main goals” (Beath et al., 2012b, p. 6).
DRC	“To improve the stability and quality of life for communities in eastern DRC through structured, participatory, and inclusive collective action. By establishing and strengthening participatory local governance committees [the program aims. . .] to improve the understanding and practice of democratic governance , improve citizens’ relationships with local government, and improve social cohesion and thereby communities’ ability to resolve conflict peacefully. The conduit to achieve these purposes will be village- and community-level projects that themselves will contribute to socio-economic rehabilitation as DRC moves into a post-conflict and development period” (Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 11). “While people’s vision of democracy’s dividends [in anticipation of Congolese elections] is in all probability unrealistic in time and scope, it is nevertheless vital that they receive tangible returns for their enduring tolerance. It is thus crucial that the post-election period deliver peace dividends. . . ” (International Rescue Committee, 2006a, p. 11).
Liberia	“...the project aims to improve material welfare, build institutions and promote community cohesion by bringing together all actors within the community, including local government, civil society and private sector to identify priority problems/needs and to develop community action plans for implementation.” (International Rescue Committee, 2006b, p. 1). “This model was adopted, in part, as a strategy for using local leadership to quickly generate material improvements in people’s lives. Given the state of the government after fifteen years of civil war communities could plausibly also move more quickly than government to deliver a tangible peace dividend ” (Fearon et al., 2008, pp. 2–3).
Sierra Leone	“Through intensive, long term facilitation, CDD aims to strengthen local institutions , make them more democratic and inclusive of marginalized groups, and enhance the capacity of communities to engage in collective action ” (Casey et al., 2011c, p. 1).

a crucial part of the documented motivation for CDD programs and arose repeatedly in the interviews we describe below.

These four studies represent, as far as we know, the full set of randomized field experiments on this topic for which results were available and show important methodological consistency.⁴ Each of the four studies we review was a well-powered (in a statistical sense) randomized field experiment. The researchers carried out the randomization in collaboration with implementers, using public lotteries to select program communities from broader pools of eligible communities. Each compares outcomes in program areas to credible approximations of the counterfactual of “what would have been” with no program (Angrist & Pischke, 2009; Banerjee & Duflo, 2011; Karlan & Appel, 2011). Moreover, the four studies were informed by a similar set of substantive hypotheses and were each subject to academic scrutiny prior to being fielded. Indeed, Beath et al. (2012), Casey et al. (2011), Casey et al. (2012a), and Humphreys et al. (2012) registered their hypotheses and pre-analysis plans prior to going into the field. The pre-analysis plans guard against “data snooping” and other threats to validity arising from having many statistical tests from which one could strategically choose results that favor one or another argument (Anderson, 2008; Casey et al., 2012a; Humphreys, Sanchez de la Sierra, & van der Windt, 2013). While we raise a number of methodological issues in the discussion below, these studies provide highly credible tests of whether presumed effects of CDD were in fact operative.

Synthesizing results is nonetheless a challenge. Scholars have not standardized measures of institutional change in a manner that corresponds to what one has in medical or education research. A reason may be that appropriate conceptualizations of institutional change may be highly context specific (Mansuri & Rao, 2004, p. 31). While some concepts, such as “trust”, find universal application in the social sciences, studies still vary in the way that they precisely define and measure such concepts (King et al., 2010). The four studies vary in the way that they measure social and institutional effects. Hypothesis 1 from our theory section focuses on whether CDD interventions changed participation habits and attitudes toward such participation in community

development decision-making. The studies in our synthesis measure such changes in terms of participation rates, perceptions about who should be involved in community decision-making, and whether CDD-established decision-making bodies were effective. Hypothesis 2 focuses on whether CDD interventions affect communities’ durable and transferable capacities for inclusive and cooperative problem solving and collective action. The studies measure such effects in terms of performance in collective tasks beyond CDD program activities as well as generalized attitudes toward rights and inter-personal and inter-group relations. A trend in the four studies is a shift away from exclusively survey-based measurement to the inclusion of behavioral measures such as economic games and structured “real life” activities, described in Table 4.

In addition to reviewing the results included in the published studies, we conducted fifteen interviews with experts on CDD in conflict-affected areas, including at least one author from each study, authors of past reviews, and practitioners from implementing agencies.⁵ These interviews provided us with insights on researchers’ intentions behind various research design strategies and their suggested interpretations of the findings. They also provided practitioner perspectives on the rationales behind program design features and inner workings of the programs in relation to local-level contexts. We refer to these interviews in our discussion of the empirical findings below.

We synthesize the results of these four studies by focusing on how their findings relate to the two hypotheses derived above. Our approach is modeled on the principle of “best evidence synthesis,” in which one focuses attention on results from studies of exceptional rigor and generalizability and presents results from these studies side-by-side in a comparable format, using contextual information to flesh out the implications of the findings (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, pp. 181–183; Slavin, 1995). Our ability to synthesize results is limited by the rather different measurement strategies used in the studies.⁶ Thus, we do not go so far as to perform a quantitative meta-analysis or to combine effect estimates across studies. Rather, we provide a narrative synthesis that still allows us to derive general conclusions.

Table 4. *Behavioral measures*

Case	Targeted behavior	Type and description of behavioral measure
Afghanistan	(1) The quality of the targeting—whether aid recipients were among the vulnerable members of the community; (2) The extent of corruption—whether village leaders retained aid for themselves or for their relatives.	A distribution of wheat was organized to assess how NSP affects the quality of local governance. Village leaders in 491 communities in the sample received wheat from the World Food Program to distribute it to the needy. To get at the mechanisms behind the effect of local institutions, there was a randomized variation in whether the wheat was handed out for distribution to people who are considered village leaders by the villagers themselves or whether elected officials or women are explicitly required to participate in the process (Beath et al., 2013a).
DRC	“Did areas that took part in <i>Tuungane</i> engage differently with RAPID relative to those that did not?” (Humphreys et al., 2012, 7).	A new intervention called RAPID was designed to assess the impact of the CDD program. 560 communities (half of which participated in <i>Tuungane</i> and the other half did not) were selected to participate in an unconditional cash transfer program in which they would receive grants of \$1,000 to be used on village projects. Communities were actually told that they would be receiving \$900, but \$1,000 was in fact given in order to provide a measurement of whether leaders report unanticipated gains to populations. There were no guidance as to who should manage the funds and how decisions should be made (Humphreys et al., 2012, pp. 29–31).
Liberia	“Observe how communities conduct themselves when they confront major decisions and to what extent they are able to mobilize participation from community members” (Fearon et al., 2008, 25).	A community-wide public goods game, entirely separate from project implementers and evaluators, was announced one week in advance to communities. On game day, individuals were then selected at random from 24 randomly selected households, given approximately 5USD, and asked to privately decide how much to contribute to the community and how much to keep for themselves. There were also variants in this public goods game in which women only groups played the game, and in which there were variations in the amount of interest on community contributions (Fearon et al., 2008, 25; Fearon et al., 2011).
Sierra Leone	Respectively, (1) ability for collective action; (2) participation and quality of participation; (3) elite capture and collective action.	Three “structured community activities” provided communities an asset and an opportunity, allowing the study team to observe how communities responded. These entailed (1) vouchers to each community that could only be redeemed if matching funds were raised; (2) community choice of one gift among two options; (3) gift of one tarp to each community (Casey et al., 2011, pp. 21–2).

4. RESULTS

We consider evidence from each of the studies in relation to our two hypotheses related to CDD and fast-track institution building. Table 5 contains effect estimates associated with hypotheses 1 and 2. Table 5 reports indicators, associated control group means (when available), estimated treatment effects (difference between treatment and control group means as reported in published results), standard errors, and *t*-statistics. The first column indicates with which hypothesis the effect is associated. Many of the indicators that were used in the studies took the form of standardized indices. The study authors constructed these indices from batteries of survey questions or performance indicators. Each of these items is assumed to provide some information on conditions relating to an abstract concept (e.g., “perception that village assembly provides services,” “activeness of participation,” or “efficacy”). By combining the information from the various measures, one both avoids problems associated with multiple testing and also gets a more precise measure for the aggregate concept than would be provided by any of the items in isolation (Anderson, 2008; Casey et al., 2012a). These indices are usually standardized relative to the control group distribution, which is why so many of the indicators have control group means near zero. The effect sizes are therefore in terms of control group (or, more meaningfully, counterfactual outcome distribution) standard deviations.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that CDD interventions would produce novel, broad-based, and positive experience of participation in an effective community decision-making process. The studies provided statistics on attendance rates in program activities, although it is difficult to know whether these rates represent “good” or “bad” quantities of participation for each context, to say nothing of quality.⁷ More illuminating are estimates of effects of CDD programs on broad-based community level participation in decision-making during the time of the program, whether decisions during the CDD program generated outputs that a broad range of community members valued, and whether the community appreciated their participation in community decision-making. The Afghanistan study by Beath et al. (2013a) provides considerable leverage on these questions because it includes a midline evaluation undertaken in the middle of the implementation period of the project. Their results largely support hypothesis 1, as shown in Table 5 (indicators 1–6). During the project period, Beath et al. found that individuals in CDD program communities attended more village assemblies, although the magnitude of the effect was rather small. Nonetheless, the CDD program greatly increased women’s participation in village councils, perceptions that the village assemblies provided services (and services for women in particular), and participation in local governance during the term of the program. Finally, with respect to perceptions of the importance of broad-based participation, Beath et al. found significant increases in

Table 5. *Estimated effects on capacities for cooperative problem solving and collective action*

Hyp.	Indicator	Control mean	Treatment Effect	Standard Error	t-Statistic
<i>Afghanistan (National Solidarity Program)</i>					
1	1 Number of assembly meetings attended annually (midline)	NA	0.10	0.03	3.33*
1	2 Woman is a member in village council (midline)	NA	0.54	0.04	13.50*
1	3 Std. index of perception that village assembly provides governance services (midline)	0.00	0.36	0.11	3.27*
1	4 Std. index of preference for village assembly to provide local governance services (midline)	0.00	0.05	0.02	2.18*
1	5 Probability that development project preferences change as a result of past demands being met	NA	0.01	0.18	0.06
1	6 Std. index of participation in local governance (midline)	0.00	0.10	0.03	3.29*
2	7 Number of assembly meetings attended annually (endline)	NA	-0.01	0.04	-0.37
2	8 Woman is a member in village council (endline)	NA	0.38	0.03	11.24*
2	9 Std. index of perception that village assembly provides services (endline)	0.00	0.12	0.11	1.07
2	10 Std. index of perception that village assembly provides services to women (endline)	0.00	0.14	0.04	3.45*
2	11 Std. index of perception that village assembly mediates disputes or provides notary services (endline)	0.00	0.02	0.38	0.06
2	12 Std. index of preference for village assembly to provide local governance (endline)	0.00	0.03	0.15	0.21
2	13 Std. index for objective measure of targeting vulnerable households in VBDA food distribution (non-CDC mandate condition)	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.03
2	14 Std. index for subjective measure of targeting vulnerable households in VBDA food distribution (non-CDC mandate condition)	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.04
2	15 Std. index of embezzlement in VBDA food distribution	0.00	-0.10	0.06	1.73
2	16 Std. index of village leader nepotism in VBDA food distribution	0.00	-0.02	0.04	0.58
2	17 Std. index of participation in VBDA food distribution decision-making	0.00	-0.07	0.04	1.65
2	18 Std. index of intra-village dispute resolution	0.00	-0.01	0.04	0.25
2	19 Std. index of interpersonal trust	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.91

Source: [Beath et al. \(2013\)](#).

Sample: 7,189 men and 6,622 women in 447 villages.

DRC (Tuungane)

1	20 Share of villagers saying they are free to participate in decision-making	0.84	0.00	0.00	-0.92
1	21 Share of women on committee	0.16	0.03	0.02	1.63*
2	22 Std. index of perceptions that leaders are duty bound to citizens	0.00	-0.02	0.06	-0.33
2	23 Std. index of perceptions that citizens have a duty to contribute to governing	0.00	-0.02	0.05	-0.40
2	24 Std. index of participation in public goods provision	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.20
2	25 Std. index of attitudes toward women and governance	0.00	0.01	0.07	0.14
2	26 RAPID meeting number of attendees	130.48	-1.98	7.40	-0.27
2	27 Std. index of activeness of participation in RAPID deliberations	0.00	-0.12	0.09	-1.33
2	28 Std. index of using electoral process for RAPID planning	0.00	0.07	0.09	0.78
2	29 Share aware of RAPID grant value	0.38	0.01	0.03	0.42
2	30 Std. index of level of community oversight of village RAPID committees	0.00	0.01	0.10	0.10
2	31 Differential in RAPID benefits allocated to migrants	0.69	-1.83	1.56	-1.17
2	32 Std. index of activeness in pursuing support from external actors	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.20
2	33 Share willing to participate in exercise to collect information on public resource management	0.38	0.04	0.03	1.13
2	34 Std. index of willingness to lend money to others in community (trust)	0.00	0.07	0.05	1.40
2	35 Std. index of perception of inter-group cleavages in community	0.00	-0.01	0.05	-0.20
2	36 Proportion willing to share hypothetical grant with other villages	0.50	0.01	0.03	0.32

Source: [Humphreys et al. \(2012\)](#).

Sample: varies from estimate to estimate—e.g., ca. 150–450 communities for RAPID estimates, ca. 1,500–5,000 respondents for survey estimates.

Table 5. (continued)

Hyp.	Indicator	Control mean	Treatment Effect	Standard Error	t-Statistic
<i>Liberia (CDR in Lofa Program)</i>					
1	37 Std. index of efficacy	0.00	0.51	0.20	2.55*
1	38 Std. index of participation	-0.02	0.54	0.21	2.54*
2	39 Avg. share of 300 Liberian dollars shared in public goods game	0.76	0.07	0.03	2.50*
2	40 Std. index of women's rights	-0.01	0.33	0.20	1.63
2	41 Std. index of democraticness	0.00	0.32	0.18	1.78
2	42 Std. index of inclusion of excombatants	-0.01	0.54	0.21	2.54*
2	43 Std. index of inclusion of migrants	-0.02	0.53	0.19	2.71*
2	44 Std. index of trust in leaders	0.00	0.63	0.21	3.09*
2	45 Std. index of reduced tensions	0.00	0.48	0.21	2.24*
2	46 Std. index of social capital	-0.02	0.45	0.20	2.28*
Source: Fearon et al. (2008), Fearon et al. (2011). Sample: 83 communities.					
<i>Sierra Leone (GoBifo)</i>					
1	47 Std. index for a functioning development committee that delivers benefits	0.00	0.35	0.03	11.73*
1	48 Std. index of participation in local governance	0.00	0.11	0.05	2.43*
2	48 Std. index of inclusion and participation community decisions	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.03
2	50 Std. index of access to information on local governance	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.08
2	51 Std. index of collective action and public goods contribution	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.98
2	52 Std. index of trust	0.00	0.04	0.06	0.66
2	53 Std. index of group and network ties	0.00	0.03	0.04	0.75
2	54 Std. index of crime and conflict reduction	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.52
Source: Casey et al. (2011), Casey et al. (2012a). Sample: 236 communities.					

"Std. index" refers to a summary index of outcomes standardized with respect to control group means and standard deviations.

Standard errors for indicators 4, 6, and 13–19 inferred from reported *p*-values.

"NA" means the statistic was not available from information in the published results.

* *p* < .05 for two-way test of null of no treatment effect.

perceptions that representative assemblies should select and manage village projects and resolve disputes. The one finding that runs contrary to these generally positive trends is that people did not update their development project preferences in light of previously prioritized needs having been met by the CDD project.

Humphreys et al. also found mostly positive effects in relation to hypothesis 1. The *Tuungane* "projects were implemented according to plan" (2012, p. 15) and nearly 70% of all projects were matched to villagers' preferences (2012, p. 24). 81% of the population reported *Tuungane* to be "helpful" and only 2% reported it to be harmful (2012, p. 19). The share of women on councils increased in *Tuungane* communities. Nonetheless, the share of villagers saying that they were free to participate in decision-making was not higher in project communities.⁸

The Sierra Leone study (Casey et al., 2011; Casey et al., 2012a) too found positive effects with respect to hypothesis 1. Casey et al. used an index that aggregated items measuring the proper functioning of local development committees and their ability to deliver tangible benefits, finding that the CDD program significantly boosted the potential for this to happen. Respondents reported that roughly 38% of these decisions were made by the chief and other leaders, with 43% of decisions made by "everyone", 1% made by an outsider, and 18% unknown (Casey et al., 2011, p. 32). Similarly, they found that the CDD program boosted local levels of participation in community decision-making during the project implementation period.⁹ As for the material projects that were selected as part of the CDD program, Casey et al. indicated "the program did what it said it would" (2011, p. 1).

Finally, in Liberia, Fearon et al. (2011) found a statistically significant increase in their index measures of participants' efficacy and participation. Nonetheless, there was no significant difference between the average share who reported selected projects were among "most important" for the village in treatment and control communities (Fearon et al., 2008, p. 29). In sum, the kinds of immediate effects covered by hypothesis 1 were generally realized.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that through the kinds of effects covered by hypothesis 1, and learning-by-doing or demonstration effects, CDD interventions would generate a transferable and durable increase in a community's capacity for cooperative problem solving and collective action. For effects on inclusive and cooperative problem solving and collective action to be "durable and transferable," it must be that they alter behavior in situations that require collective action but that are distant in terms of time or functional domain relative to the CDD program itself—in other words, that people use the processes and/or values developed through CDD for non-CDD program purposes. This idea motivated the behavioral outcome strategies described in Table 4, involving new opportunities for collective action, after the end of the CDD programs. These behavioral outcome strategies form the core of our assessment of hypothesis 2, although we also draw on other indicators, such as survey-based measures of intra-community trust. As Table 5 shows, the studies cast doubt on the validity of hypothesis 2, with the Liberia study standing out as something of an outlier.

In Afghanistan, Beath et al. (2013a) found in their endline evaluation that CDD communities did not exhibit significantly higher levels of attendance in village assemblies, perceptions that village assemblies provide services, or preference for village

assemblies to provide governance. This is despite the fact that at midline (and thus during the implementation period) CDD villages performed better on *all of these measures*. Their behavioral “village benefits distribution activity” (VBDA) showed no significant effects of CDD on whether vulnerable households were targeted for benefits, whether embezzlement or nepotism was reduced, or extent of participation in the VBDA decision-making. As for within-village social cohesion, Beath et al. found no significant effects on measures of intra-village dispute resolution capacities or interpersonal trust. The one exception to this general trend of null results was for women’s empowerment outcomes: they found that CDD significantly increased women’s representation in village councils and increased the extent of village assembly service provision to women.

For Humphreys et al.’s (2012) DRC study, there is nothing from either the RAPID assessment (non-conditional cash transfer exercise) or other indicators of village-level collective action or cohesion to indicate significant social or institutional effects. Humphreys et al. found no significant effects of CDD on attendance in RAPID meetings, activeness of participation in such meetings, use of electoral processes, awareness of details of the RAPID grants, community oversight in RAPID activities, or allocation of benefits to vulnerable communities such as migrants. Neither did they find any significant effects on communities’ capacities to engage external actors for support, rates of participation in various forms of community-level collective action, or indicators of trust and intra-village cohesion.

For Sierra Leone, Casey et al. (2012a) constructed indices for various social and institutional outcomes using a combination of their structured community activities and survey questionnaires. They found no significant effects on indicators for inclusion and participation in community decisions, access to information on local governance, collective action and public goods contribution, trust, group and network ties, or intra-village crime and conflict resolution.

The one exception to this general trend of null findings is the Liberia study of Fearon et al. (2011). This study did find that CDD caused significantly higher levels of cooperative play in an incentivized public goods game that they designed, and this effect came along with increases in survey-based measures of women’s rights, endorsement of democratic norms, inclusiveness of vulnerable groups such as ex-combatants and migrants, trust in local leaders, reduced tensions, and various forms of social capital. The results from the public goods game, however, require qualification. In examining these effects in more detail, Fearon et al. note that significant effects were found only when the game was played in a mixed-gender, rather than women-only, configuration, which is not a commonly occurring situation in Liberia. While the games may, therefore, demonstrate durable and transferable change, the opportunities for community-members to use the CDD-inspired institutions are limited and the change does not carry over to problems for which the rules may include male only or female only solutions.

In conflict-affected contexts, the possibility of adverse effects is of particular concern. Along these lines, Beath et al. found that in Afghanistan, the mandated female participation requirement in the CDD program created some tension in communities, sometimes resulting in women “being denied meaningful participation in the program, despite a strong interest, and projects favored by or benefitting women getting de-prioritized by powerful male elites” (2012a, p. 8, citing Boesen 2004; Brick 2008). For Sierra Leone, while Casey et al. (2012a) found no adverse effects at the level of their aggregate indices, they did find occasional negative effects associated with some of their component indicators. Of the 59 outcome variables included in their index related to collec-

tive action and contributions to local public goods, 7 treatment effects met a 95% confidence level of statistical significance, 5 positive and 2 negative, aggregating to a “zero effect when considered as a group” (Casey et al., 2011, p. 37).

The general thrust of the findings is that while CDD programs can consistently create venues for broad-based participation in effective development decision-making during the CDD intervention, this experience does not typically generate durable and transferable capacities for cooperative problem solving and collective action. The Liberia study stands as something of an exception, but closer inspection suggests that the differences are not as pronounced as they first appear.

A counter-argument might be that by focusing on social and institutional goals, we have centered on goals that are too ambitious. If a project succeeds in meeting its less ambitious goals, but fails to meet its most ambitious goals, should we consider it a failure overall?¹⁰ In terms of economic welfare, the study in Sierra Leone stands out for its positive results, measured by a “standard index of general economic welfare.” For the study from Afghanistan, the endline results are mixed: while there is no substantial effect on income, consumption, assets, or food insecurity, women perceived that their economic situation had improved. The studies from DRC and Liberia do not find positive economic effects.¹¹

Recent reviews of CDD in non-conflict settings come to conclusions that are broadly consistent with the findings presented here. Mansuri and Rao (2012) draw on nearly 500 studies of participatory development or decentralization programs, finding that while some outcomes tend to benefit from such localized and participatory approaches (resource sustainability and the quality of infrastructure), these programs fail to live up to their promise in contributing to long-lasting social and institutional change. Wong (2012) has a more narrow focus on World Bank-funded CDD programs evaluated to rigorous impact evaluation standards (though generally quasi-experimental). She finds that across the programs there is strong evidence for improved access to, and use of, services such as water and education, as well as positive effects on economic welfare (a more encouraging finding than here). However, the evidence on social or institutional effects is much less consistent and often lacking, although such effects are not examined at all in many studies that she reviews.

Overall, this synthesis does not lead to a conclusion that CDD, as currently designed or conceptualized, is a “proven impact” intervention (IPA website, n.d.): while CDD has been tested using rigorous methods, the theory of change is inadequately clear, results mixed or null, and our knowledge about cost-effectiveness relative to other potential approaches very little.

5. DISCUSSION

Why do CDD interventions fail to meet expectations of social and institutional transformation in conflict-affected contexts? In our discussion that follows we propose some answers, marshaling available evidence to evaluate their plausibility. We focus on issues related to motivating assumptions, program design, and evaluation methodology, with context as a common thread across all three.

(a) *Motivating assumptions: need and opportunity*

Consider first the motivating assumptions behind CDD programs in conflict-affected contexts: that there exist both a need and opportunity for institution building. Contrary to assump-

Table 6. *Baseline levels of governance and social cohesion*

Case	Participation in governance	Trust	Democratic norms	Membership in groups	Conflict/tensions
Afghanistan National Solidarity Program	Both male and female respondents reported having attended the last council meetings at 35% and 47% respectively (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2008, p. viii).	Eighty-four percent of male and 69% of female respondents believed they could trust a fellow villager to collect money on their behalf. 91% of male and 81% of female respondents thought that people in the village generally help each other (Beath et al., 2008, p. 12).	Seventy percent of women agreed that women should be allowed council membership; 86% supported a separate female council. 43% of men agreed that women should be granted council membership, but 85% supported a separate female council (Beath et al., 2008, p. viii).		Sixty-one percent of male household respondents and 50% of male focus group respondents reported that there was at least one dispute in their village during the past year. About 85% of male household and male focus group respondents claimed that disputes in their village were successfully resolved (Beath et al., 2008, p. ix).
DRC <i>Tuungane</i>	Eighty-four percent in control communities opined that they are free to participate in decision-making (Humphreys et al., 2012, pp. 48, 62).	Ninety-three percent of respondents in control communities reported that they would trust (be willing to lend money to) someone from their village to go to market (Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 62).	The likelihood of using elections in the RAPID non-conditional cash transfer exercise was just as high approximately 50% treatment and control (Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 7).		In control communities, just 14% report ethnic cleavages, 22% report class cleavages, and 12.5% report gender-based cleavages (Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 63).
Liberia CDR Program	Eighty percent in control areas (at endline) reported having attended a town meeting (Fearon et al., 2008, p. 17); At baseline, nearly 90% reported attending a town meeting in the past six months (Fearon, Humphreys, & Weinstein, 2007, p.3).	At baseline, 65% reported willingness to act as a guarantor (for credit) for people of their town (Fearon et al., 2007, p. 40).	Sixty percent in control areas agreed “that all should be permitted to take part in decisions”; 79% agreed “that women should have equal rights”; and 82% agreed that “leaders should be chosen through elections” (Fearon et al., 2008, p. 15).	Ninety percent of baseline respondents indicated that they belonged to at least one social organization and 50% indicated belonging to at least three (Fearon et al., 2011, p. 11).	Only 6% of respondents said they faced difficulties in gaining acceptance in their community (Fearon et al., 2007, p. 35.).
Sierra Leone <i>GoBifo</i>	About 85% of respondents claimed to have voted in the last election (Casey et al., 2011, p. 19).	More than “81% of respondents had trusted a neighbor with goods to sell on their behalf in the local market” (Casey et al., 2012b, p. 16).	Eighty percent of control respondents (at endline) agreed with the statement “It’s wrong to pay a bribe to any government official” and 59% agreed that “no one should be forced to do something they don’t want to do” (Casey et al., 2012a, appendix, p. 64).	The average respondent was a member of more than 2 of 5 common social groups (Casey et al., 2012b, p. 16).	97% at baseline had no report of a physical fight in the past year (Casey et al., 2012a, appendix, pp. 46, 64); 83% of control group (at endline) reported no conflict in which s/he needed help from someone outside the household to resolve in the past year.

tions of a complete breakdown of social fabric, evidence across the studies suggests that without CDD programming, communities exhibited high functioning in their informal institutions to promote broad-based collective action. Table 6 shows, as available¹², relatively high baseline or control community values (in each case, meaning levels in the absence of CDD intervention) of such factors as the existence of local governance institutions, participation in governance, trust of other community members, some democratic norms, and membership in community groups. The findings warrant rethinking of contextual assumptions upon which CDD interventions take place. High social cohesion in conflict-affected contexts goes against the narrative proposed in the theoretical and programmatic literature cited above, but is actually consistent with recent micro-empirical work. Bellows and Miguel (2009), Blattman (2009), Gilligan, Pasquale, and Samii (2014), and Voors et al. (2012) have demonstrated that

the experience of conflict tends to *increase* local collective action capacities even among bystanders to violence (and not solely among those mobilized to fight). Indeed, the DRC study authors pondered the possibility “that the program [was] pitched at the wrong level to effect change in governance structures and social cohesion; *Tuungane* [focused] on the most local levels which may not display the same problems of cohesion and weak governance that are so visible in Congo at the macro level” (Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 8).

Further, these studies do not provide details on the ways in which the interventions create new institutions and/or build on existing institutions, which would speak to whether these conflicts really present “critical junctures” that sufficiently disrupt existing institutions so as to open windows of opportunity for institution-building (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the Sierra Leone study posits that its lack of findings on social cohesion and governance out-

comes, in contrast to the Liberia program, may be due to the fact that “the Liberia program operated in what was the “epi-center”” of the latter years of that country’s civil war, and thus may have faced more disruption to local institutions than the Sierra Leone program did. Attempts to create new institutions and norms where formal structures have broken down may encounter less resistance than efforts to persuade existing authorities to adopt new practices” (Casey et al., 2011, p.10). We do not have sufficiently comparable data on the existence and solidity of local governing institutions to judge the accuracy of this hypothesis. In any case, development programming in conflict-affected contexts might do well to shift gears away from attempting always to “heal” the social fabric and toward trying to work with exceptional levels of cohesion that are already present (Casey et al., 2012b).

(b) Program design

Various program design features run contrary to the CDD theory of change or suggest a problem with an underspecified theory of change. First, the relatively low intensity of CDD interventions may not match the ambitiousness of social and institutional transformation goals. For instance, the lack of results may be due to the relative short length of the projects (between 1.5 and 4 years). A survey of World Bank staff on general CDD programming asked “in your experience, what would be the average number of years needed for project support of community groups initially formed under the [CDD] process to reach a level of sustainability of community processes requiring very limited outside support?” Responses indicated that 52% thought the timeframe was six to ten years, only 24% suggesting it was one to five years, and the rest suggesting eleven years or more (Kumar, 2005, p. 101). Another study suggests that CDD programming may require even more time in conflict-affected areas (World Bank, 2006, p. 22). Researchers and practitioners that we interviewed stressed their belief that repeated facilitation and multiple grants would better stimulate the learning-by-doing that could lead to social and institutional change. Indeed, there is some evidence of stronger results from multiple rounds of gender-based quotas in India (cited in Beath et al., 2012, p. 24), multiple years of CDD programming in Indonesia (Barron, 2010, p. 21), and five years of participatory budgeting experience in Brazil (cited in Bland, p. 869). A long-recognized tenet of learning is repetition (Aspinwall, 1912). Finally, if CDD appears to be a one-shot “project” rather than a system for sustained support and repeated interaction, community members may have little reason to invest in new institutions that challenge elites or existing decision-making processes.

Likewise, some interviewees proposed that the relatively small size of investments may be contrary to the transformative aspirations of CDD programming. In contrast to the huge sums frequently quoted as spent on CDD initiatives, including in the introduction to this paper, Table 2 shows that the sizes of the block grants per capita topped out at around \$6 or \$7 per year. This could be compared, for instance, to the “big push” Millennium Villages project which aims to spend \$120 per capita per year (Earth Institute, 2008)¹³. Humphreys et al. raise a related problem of scale, positing that the investments in DRC were small relative to the huge population and geographic scope of the project; only about 0.7% of the population were directly involved in village development council trainings (2012, p. 18).

Second, contrary to a theory of change that prioritizes the “exercise of voice and choice”, CDD programs remain supply-driven in the sense that program implementers initiate

the intervention and set the parameters within which voice and choice can be exercised. Program-wide standardized rules regulate local decision-making (Li, 2011). For example, CDD implementing agencies typically limit, in some ways, the menu of sub-projects from which communities may choose. If the community determining investment priorities—thereby inducing accountability, incentives to economize, and collective ownership—is indeed a key part of the theory of change (related to hypothesis 1), having the community choose how to spend their block grant is crucial. An even partially restrictive menu may block that pathway. In all cases reviewed, program design required that funds be spent on public-access, rather than private, goods, although it is possible that targeted private goods, to vulnerable community members for example, would do the most to promote social cohesion. In some cases, community priorities had to be redirected since funds would not be enough to complete a community’s preferred project, despite such determination of preferred projects being central to the theory of change. It is a contradiction that the CDD exercise is meant to empower communities and allow them to make their own choices while constraining such choices and the processes through which decisions are made to those outsiders think are best (Chesterman, 2004).

Finally, the manner in which program design interacts with local context merit further investigation. Interviewees raised questions about the point of interventions and how they were situated in relation to existing institutions. For Sierra Leone, researchers pondered whether smaller communities were better able to make use of the CDD/R model than larger ones, although the study authors did not find differential treatment effects in their study (Casey et al., 2011, pp. 23–4; Casey et al., 2012a, p. 1784). Rather, looking across studies, one wonders whether the opposite logic may be at work. As Table 2 shows, the Liberia CDD program grouped villages into equally sized “communities” based on proximity and existing ties to make 2,000 to 3,000 person units of intervention (Fearon et al., 2008, p. 2). Presumably there would not have existed governance bodies at those levels. In contrast, in Sierra Leone, where the CDD program may have replicated or mimicked already existing institutions in pre-existing communities, its ability to promote change may have been undermined. The Afghanistan and DRC studies operated at somewhere between these two scales.

How community-level institutions relate to the state was a frequently raised programmatic issue in our interviews with practitioners and researchers. One can contrast the programs in Liberia and DRC, conceived and run by NGOs, to the NSP in Afghanistan and *GoBifo* in Sierra Leone, which were institutionally lodged within government departments. As Cliffe et al. write, “two contradictory risks may occur with the role of government—that it is either too close or too distant from the CDR process” (2003, p. 20). If CDD programming relies entirely on existing institutions, they risk becoming inadequately transformative and simply replicating existing power structures, which is counter to the theory of change. If, however, they create entirely new institutions, they may induce conflict with elites, be irrelevant further down the road, or undermine the legitimacy of government structures, which is objectionable in conflict-affected contexts. Mansuri and Rao deem the best approaches to participatory development those that work with a “sandwich”, based on effective top-down and bottom-up support (2012, p. 287). Bland (2010) shows that progressively minded local elites, minimal interference from existing local governance institutions, and legal protection for citizens to express themselves to be crucial to the success of participatory budgeting in El Salvador. Similar

political factors may condition the success of CDD and require further consideration.

While each of these explanations is plausible and widely posited in interviews and evaluation documents, the one case where there were some evident effects, Liberia, actually had the shortest implementation period, the lowest total investment per capita, the largest community size on average and was run by an NGO quite distant from the state. The sample of four is not large enough to come to any definitive conclusion. But Spears' thoughts warrant consideration as they apply to externally driven efforts to build social institutions:

When efforts at building peace have failed, the assumption is made that there has been a problem in terms of implementation or method... So the international community continues to advocate the same practices but recommends starting sooner and allowing for longer time frames, being more pro-active, being more inclusive, being more free of other countries and their meddling ways, involving more of the community, and being more educated and informed. All of these may be worthy endeavours. ... it is not clear that more of anything will produce more favourable [...] outcomes (Spears, 2012, p. 300).

(c) Methodological issues

The findings also raise methodological issues that ought to be addressed in further research. First is the question of levels of analysis. Since community leaders are exposed to the most intensive facilitation in most of the programs under study here, one can expect different changes at the level of leadership versus at the level of the general population. As Humphreys et al. suggest for the DRC, "it is possible that the primary effects of *Tuungane* are on leaders in communities, for example those that took part in trainings directly. If this is the case, the research is not well calibrated to capture those effects" (2012, p. 75). At present, these programs are based on a theory of change that focuses on changing the general population and the evaluations are measuring this accordingly.

A second methodological issue concerns the choice of measures. The studies found support for hypothesis 1 and also for the fact that the CDD programs were delivering benefits "as promised." But, as raised above, it is often difficult to comparatively interpret such measures as participation rates. The measures for hypothesis 1 also appear to leave out some indicators that would be crucial to the theory of change. The community projects usually involved new infrastructure, and yet none of these studies looked in detail at the quality of what was built.¹⁴ For effects of CDD to be durable and transferable (hypothesis 2), one would expect that not only does the experience of participating in CDD have to be positive, but the outputs need to be strong to illustrate what can be achieved by collective action. In our interviews, several of the study authors and practitioners noted that project quality was often quite poor. There were particular concerns regarding places where the program required community labor for technically difficult projects, such as roads and irrigation, with little quality control. In Sierra Leone the disbursement of block grants were sometimes so delayed that community members called the project "GoBien" (backward march) instead of *GoBifo* (forward march) (Sulley et al., 2010, p. 60). Our interviews also suggested that in many instances, programs were plagued by seasonal challenges, difficulty of accessing remote villages, and lack of qualified contractors to execute projects. In some cases, the lack of complementary inputs was a problem, such as new classrooms in the absence of teachers or books. Finally,

facilitators guided communities through the steps of the program, but their training and extent of involvement likely varied across projects. In conflict-affected contexts, the social position of facilitators is an important consideration but none of the studies evaluated facilitators' roles systematically (Cliffe et al., 2003, p. 13; Haider, 2009, p. 17). Factoring these considerations into indicators for hypothesis 1 could counterweigh the positive findings, thereby helping to explain why durable and transferable change (hypothesis 2) did not materialize.

Another example in relation to choice of measures concerns behavioral versus attitudinal measures. The four studies were innovative in the use of structured behavioral activities for measuring such effects. On the one hand, the use of behavioral measures is surely an improvement over relying exclusively on survey responses, as it is all too easy for survey respondents to say what they think researchers want to hear. Even when survey responses are accurate reflections of attitudes, such attitudes do not always translate into behavior (Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman, & Soutter, 2000; King et al., 2010). On the other hand, such measures can be difficult to interpret. Fearon et al.'s study pioneered the use of behavioral games in measuring the effects of CDD. They found evidence for positive effects on collective action capacity, but only in the mixed-gender public goods games, potentially mimicking a community development council situation. One author suspected that if they were to test with a situation that less precisely mimicked what went on in the CDD program (such as the RAPID test from the Humphreys et al. study in the DRC), they may not have found significant effects. In one of the structured community activities in Casey et al.'s Sierra Leone study, communities were given a tarp and then the researchers observed how it was used. The tarp ending up in the home of a leader would be interpreted as elite capture. But, an alternative interpretation (arising from our interviews with practitioners) is that, maybe, the community members did not have an immediate use for the tarp, and therefore stored it in the leader's backroom.

Third, in the theory section above we noted that there might be reason to worry of negative effects to the extent that the introduction of CDD induces conflict or competition for spoils among community decision-makers. Our hypotheses are posed in a "one-sided" manner in that they focus on potential positive effects. Of course, the manner of estimation and testing in the primary studies allows for one to pick up on perverse, negative effects even when the expectation is for positive effects. But the question remains as to whether more consideration of possible adverse effects would lead one to include additional outcomes in the evaluation.

All of these methodological issues raise the question of how additional and possibly different evidence may have been generated by complementary methods—in particular qualitative inquiry. As Levy-Paluck explains, "using qualitative research methods in [a] field experiment could have provided a different understanding of the causal effect, identified possible causal mechanisms of change, and framed new interpretive understandings of [such issues as] authority, democracy, and gender within an experimentally assessed instance of social change" (2008, p. 24; see also Barron, Diprose, & Woolcock, 2011).

A fruitful area for methodological development would be in findings ways to integrate more open-ended qualitative inquiry with quantitative field experimental methods. One recent illustration of the value of such multi-method research emerges in a discussion of how factors often considered measures of social capital, such as community meetings, can actually refer to mechanisms through which elites exert authority (Acemoglu, Reed, & Robinson, 2013).

6. CONCLUSION

Based on a review of rigorous impact evaluations from programs in Afghanistan, DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and interviews with practitioners and academic researchers, we find that the record of CDD in promoting institution building in conflict-affected contexts is positive in the short-term of the intervention but, on the whole, discouraging in terms of durable and transferable change. Based on evidence from these studies, we find the motivating assumptions that conflict-affected areas exhibit a special need and opportunity for building social institutions problematic. Program design issues may undermine performance, including panacea-type thinking combined with a relatively low intensity of intervention, the supply-driven nature of CDD that contradicts core tenets of the theory of change, and the ways in which the relationships between design and context may constitute enabling conditions for CDD programming. In terms of evaluation strategy, the choice of levels of analysis and specific measures in the evaluations may also help explain the results.

Our review suggests some priority areas for a future research agenda on CDD and related programs in conflict-affected areas. In the studies reviewed, the counterfactual to CDD is no project at all. This set of evaluations does not compare CDD to other types of projects, including top-down or centralized provision of services or other cohesion or institution building programs. To really answer questions for the aid and development communities, we need to know which type of intervention is preferable in a given context. CDD is also implemented and evaluated as a bundled treatment—it has social (i.e. facilitation and institution building) and economic (i.e. block grant) components. None of the evaluations to date can parse social from economic effects of the intervention. As the authors of the Sierra Leone evaluation note, “. . .for every dollar spent directly on community projects, roughly one dollar was spent ensuring the money was used well through facilitation, administration and oversight” (Casey et al., 2011, p.11). They continue that “the key question this evaluation cannot address is whether the program would be just as effective if the budget balance was shifted toward less facilitation and more grants to communities” (Casey et al., 2011, p. 45).

We may ask similar questions about the specific roles of the different design features (duration, size of grants, gender requirements, and other features) and how such design features interact with local institutions, state institutions, and other contextual features.

Our review also leads to a number of suggestions for donors, policy-makers, and practitioners. Our interviews revealed that there are private and public “transcripts” about CDD: opinions that people are willing to share about CDD in private differ from those that they share in public (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Scott, 1990). Like broader development discourse (Mosse in Li, 2011, p.57), writing about CDD regularly obscures the concerns and doubts of development practitioners, which came across strongly in interviews. CDD can only improve if all stakeholders are encouraged to be open about their genuine thoughts. At present, even though interviewees often call the theory of change “ridiculous” in private, public program goals very much aspire to fast-track institution building. To the extent that such goals are secondary, donors and implementers may want to ensure that this is understood and communicated clearly so as to moderate expectations about what such programs might produce. When outcomes are unrealistic and the intervention inadequately matched to the theory of change, impact evaluations are not likely to find positive results.

To the extent that the transformational goals are in fact primary, the findings from the studies reviewed here should serve as a wake-up call. Of course, one could propose, following Khwaja (2009), to forget about “fixing” social cohesion and rather focus on program and institutional designs that have been effective in settings that appear to lack supportive social institutions. How supply-driven such institution building could be merits continued consideration. Or one might retain the emphasis on building social institutions, but consider that such transformation may not arise as a by-product of development programs. King et al. (2010) found that curriculum-based community building programs more consistently achieved social cohesion goals than CDD programs, suggesting the need for focused and sustained attention to issues of social cohesion per se if social transformation is the goal.

NOTES

1. Mansuri and Rao (2012) draw a distinction between induced and organic participation, with CDD an example of the former.
2. This paper summarizes and builds on the results of King (2013).
3. Details of the search are described in King (2013). Our study has very different goals than the World Bank's (2006) review of CDD in conflict-affected areas, given that the World Bank review was focused on program design and inner workings rather than on the effects of the programs on host communities.
4. Our search updated the list in King et al. (2010), focusing only on CDD programs in conflict-affected countries.
5. King (2013) provides more detail on the interviews.
6. We had considered organizing the effect estimates by outcome concept, but doing so was complicated by the extreme heterogeneity in the ways that outcomes were defined. For instance, the standard index of participation from the Liberia study is based on “reports on community

initiatives and willingness to work together, individual participation in community meetings and contacts with various authorities, frequency of community meetings, and intention to vote and work with a political party” (Fearon et al., 2011, p. 48). In contrast, the standard index of participation in local governance in the Sierra Leone study includes 15 outcomes: “Respondents voted in 2007 1st round Presidential elections, 2007 2nd round Presidential elections, and 2008 Local elections; A community member stood for Paramount Chief, Section Chief, Local Council and WDC; Respondents have met a Local Councillor; Respondents have attended a WDC meeting; Respondents feel like they could change an unjust chiefdom law and an unjust LC policy; Respondents believe the LC listens to what their community says; Community has a Village Development Committee (VDC); Community has a Village Development Plan (VDP); Respondents discuss politics” plus a host of conditional outcomes (Casey et al., 2011, p. 29).

7. In Afghanistan, an average of 140 villagers (plus 14 committee members) attended village meetings to select sub-projects, representing more than a third of the adult village population on average; in cases where sub-projects were selected by referendum (a variation in treatment), on average, more than 250 people voted, representing 60% of the

adult village population (Beath et al., 2013a, 13). The DRC study reports that 30% of the total treated population, and 23% of women and 36% of men, attended at least one meeting (Humphreys et al., 2012, 22). In Liberia, 53% of registered voters participated in elections of CDC members (International Rescue Committee, 2008, 3) and 60% of the total treatment population “actively participated” in bringing materials to, and working on, sub-projects (International Rescue Committee 2008, 10). In Sierra Leone, 64% of respondents said that they attended the meeting where the Village Facilitator was chosen and 41% said they attended a meeting to draft the Village Development Plan (Casey et al., 2011, 32).

8. With control community values of 84% positive responses, a threshold may already have been reached. It is difficult to compare this figure to the other studies which have values standardized back to zero.

9. Casey et al. stress that the effects on the “participation in local governance” index were driven by outcomes associated with the functioning of local development committees during the CDD program’s implementation period (2012a, p. 1801).

10. We thank Robert Blair for raising this question.

11. For a more fulsome discussion of the economic impacts of these CDD programs, see King (2013).

12. We chose to include measures of governance and social cohesion that were most repeated and comparable across studies.

13. Thanks to Macartan Humphreys for highlighting this comparison.

14. Casey et al. (2011, p. 32) do report on perceptions of project quality.

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