

## Interventions to Promote Social Cohesion in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## 1. Background

Our review will examine development, reconstruction, and peacebuilding interventions in sub-Saharan Africa aiming to generate social cohesion. To our knowledge, there are no previous reviews on this specific topic.

### 1.1. What is social cohesion?

While re-popularized in the 1990s, the term social cohesion dates at least to Durkheim (1893), who studied the effects of modernization and industrialization on forms of solidarity. Social cohesion is variously described as the “affective bonds between citizens” (Chipkin and Ngqulunga 2008), “local patterns of cooperation” (Fearon et al 2009) and “the glue that bonds society together, promoting harmony, a sense of community, and a degree of commitment to promoting the common good” (Colletta et al 2001). Discussions of social cohesion arise in analyzing the causes and consequences of social upheaval, violence, misallocation of aid, entrenched poverty, slow or negative economic growth, and failures to realize welfare gains from market-oriented economic reforms (Colletta et al. 2000; Easterly et al 2006; Ritzen et al 2000; Winters 2008). Nowhere are these issues more pressing than in sub-Saharan Africa.

Social cohesion thus refers to a complex of behavioral and attitudinal attributes of a community, by which we mean a geographically-based entity. We offer some conceptual precision here for the purposes of our review. We can distinguish between inter-personal and inter-group social cohesion. Inter-personal social cohesion derives from the observation that different groupings of individuals vary in their abilities to overcome a given collective action problem. Inter-personal social cohesion can thus be measured in terms of the regularity with which the collective action problem is solved without coercion or compensation by some overarching authority. More socially cohesive communities tend to solve collective action problems that would seem to have stronger incentives for non-cooperation. Real world applications include socially optimal exploitation of natural resources and the organization of local public finance and insurance mechanisms. Landmark observational studies by Ostrom (1990) and Ellikson (1991) marked a renewed interest in inter-personal social cohesion among social scientists. The observational research frontier has been pushed furthest with the “laboratories in the field” measurement approach employed by Henrich et al (2004). Inter-personal social cohesion may also be gauged with attitudinal measures of individuals’ feelings of trust, harmony and solidarity with other community members.

Inter-group social cohesion derives from the observation that communities typically feature cleavages around which conflict or non-cooperation *might* be organized. The more socially cohesive the society, the less such sub-group identities are likely to delimit networks of regular cooperation and exchange. Conceptually, suppose one had two communities with one and the same latent cleavage. In terms of behavior, the *more* socially cohesive community would be the one where the probability of a cooperative transaction between two individuals or groups remains high even when the identities of the two are different. In terms of attitudes, the more socially cohesive community would be the one where fewer members of the community deem parochial, sub-group objectives or privileges legitimate. It may also be a community where group members express feelings of trust, harmony and solidarity with members of other groups. This is a different notion of social cohesion than one measured simply in terms of the number of potential lines of cleavage (Easterly and Levine 1997; Posner 2004). For the purposes of development and peacebuilding theory and practice, we feel that our conceptualization is more useful. Latent cleavages such as

language differences, differences in descent, or caste-type distinctions cannot or can only be very difficultly manipulated by development, reconstruction, or peacebuilding interventions. In contrast, the way people think about and act across these cleavages can, in principle, be transformed.

The term social cohesion is often used interchangeably with social capital (see, e.g. Mansuri and Rao 2004). Indeed, our notions of inter-personal and inter-group social cohesion resemble the notions of “bonding” and “bridging” social capital popularized by Putnam (2000). Social capital is often seen as an individual-level asset, as emphasized in Coleman (1990) and Hardin (1999). We prefer to use the term social cohesion to emphasize that we are talking about attributes of *groups*.

The literature on social capital includes many commentaries on how bonding social capital may undermine bridging social capital by reinforcing social divisions (see, e.g., Hardin 1995). The same is true for our notions of inter-personal and inter-group social cohesion. While we will equally include studies of inter-personal and inter-group social cohesion, our evaluation of the quality of social cohesion interventions will be attentive to whether or not this issue is considered.

## **1.2. Social cohesion in development and peacebuilding practice**

Social cohesion features prominently in current development practice. Recent pronouncements by governments and major international agencies reflect a widely held belief that social cohesion provides a foundation for growth and development. For example, the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development formally promoted social cohesion, along with other social goals such as equity, to being a central tenet in current development practice (United Nations 1995). The World Bank subsequently established its Social Development Department, which associates improvements in social cohesion with shared and sustainable economic development (World Bank 2005).

It is also now commonly understood that social cohesion contributes to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Reconciliation, or the (re)building of interpersonal and intergroup networks, trust, and reciprocity, is considered crucial for sustainable peace (Colletta et al. 2000; Woolcock 2000). The attention to social cohesion is evident in the mainstreaming of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding programming in the major development banks and national development agencies.

The twin goals of development and peacebuilding are also related. A 2006 UK House of Commons review argued, for example, that “preventing and ending conflicts and helping to ensure they do not recur will do more to create a climate for poverty reduction and development in countries affected than any amount of costly aid programmes” (International Development Committee 2006:58).

Given this policy emphasis on social cohesion, development actors have initiated efforts to strengthen social cohesion in aid-receiving countries. A pro-social cohesion orientation has informed major development interventions in Africa. This includes programming directed by the World Bank’s Social Development Department, the International Rescue Committee, and CHF International. A clear sense of “what works” is thus in increasingly high demand. This review will address this demand. Our review is complementary to work by Mansuri and Rao (2004), who review the effects of social development interventions on other development outcomes. A difference between their review and ours is that we focus on social cohesion

itself as the outcome of interest. Another difference is that we apply Campbell Collaboration standards.

### **1.3. Social cohesion interventions and presumed effects**

Social cohesion interventions take various forms. Interventions aimed to promote social cohesion include social funds and Community-Driven Development and Reconstruction projects, “which support the establishment of new local institutions in order to promote social reconciliation” (Fearon et al. 2008). Education or media programs may be established to build trust or affective bonds between community members (Heyneman and Todoric-Bebic 2000; Heyneman 2003; Levy-Paluck 2007). The same goals may be sought in the organization of social activities such as sports leagues (HoumIglund and Sundberg 2008). This is a sampling of known intervention types, and our review will move us toward a fuller understanding of the variety of interventions. The presumption is that these interventions should shift communities toward a new equilibrium in which social cohesion in general is greater. A goal of the review will be to catalog the set of mechanisms that researchers invoke as bringing about such transformation.

While these interventions are presumed (via various mechanisms) to increase social cohesion, some authors have suggested that they may generate or reinforce societal divisions. Resources introduced through interventions may be susceptible to elite capture (see examples in Mansuri and Rao 2004). Some interventions to promote social cohesion may call for a return to a “golden age” (Jenson 1998), but fail to examine important inequalities and power relations lurking in communities’ pasts (Grischow and McKnight 2008; Grischow 2008). Interventions aimed to promote community participation may induce certain community members to become more involved, and others to be increasingly marginalized (Gugerty and Kremer 2008; Richards et al. 2005). Some interventions may focus exclusively on unity, to the detriment of all else and hide injustice and inequality (Bernard 1999; Colletta et al. 2000; Jenson 1998; Joshee 2004). A number of interventions have been found to contribute more to dividing societies than to bringing them together (see Anderson 1999; King 2005, 2008; Uvin 1998). We will review evidence on whether and in what contexts these contrary effects emerge.

### **1.4. How to measure social cohesion?**

Social cohesion can be measured using qualitative and quantitative research methods. A goal of the review will be to assess measures that are used.<sup>1</sup> While we feel that the conceptualization given above is consistent with the ways that social cohesion is used in research and practice, this conceptualization does present some measurement challenges. First, it is a multidimensional construct and, as the inter-personal and inter-group distinction above makes clear, it operates at multiple levels of analysis. Furthermore, social cohesion at one level may not aggregate into social cohesion at a higher level, for example from village to district level (Green et al 2006; Sobel 151). Second, the form of social cohesion may change with time, for example, from inter-group to inter-personal cohesion within one’s group (Woolcock 2000). As such, the content of social cohesion is as important as the level. Third, measures of social cohesion may be culturally specific (ie. Mansuri and Rao 2004; Colletta, Narayan and Cassidy 1999). Given these challenges, different proxies or indices may be fundamentally incomparable (for examples see Harriss 92). For example,

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of how social capital has been measured, see the World Bank’s Social Capital resource page: <http://go.worldbank.org/A77F30UIX0>. Many of these measures can be used to measure social cohesion.

the social capital and social cohesion research has tended to rely on attitudinal measures rather than behavioral measures. But evidence suggests that attitudinal and behavioral measures of trust, for example, do not always correlate (see Glaeser et al 2000). Our review will offer a more general test of this claim. We will also assess whether determinations of programs "success" tend to depend on the types of measures that are used. We will review arguments within the studies for and against different types of measures, and provide our take on why some measures might be preferred over others.

## **2. Objectives of the review**

In line with C2 and 3ie goals, we aim to review empirical research on social cohesion interventions to help policy-makers, practitioners and academics understand the available evidence. It will answer the following questions:

- What projects in Africa have been studied in terms of their impact on social cohesion?
- What did the studies find? In particular, what have they discovered about the mechanisms underlying the production of social cohesion? What are the outcomes?
- What are the scope conditions on these findings?
- What do the findings suggest about mediating effects?
- What do the findings suggest about appropriately measuring social cohesion outcomes?
- What do the findings suggest about scaling-up interventions of this type?

Typically practitioners face at least three issues in deciding whether and what kind of intervention should be taken:

- What form should the intervention take?
- Are there possible negative consequences?
- Are there other projects upon which money and effort could better be spent?

Our review will address these issues by showing variation in treatment effects, magnitude of effects, and relationship between magnitude and treatment types. To the extent possible we will produce general statements about treatment effects and discuss possible reasons for varying or conflicting results. A secondary objective is to identify gaps in the literature and to suggest a research agenda. Thus, we will also discuss where development and peacebuilding interventions, and the analysis of such interventions, have failed in taking full account of the various dimensions of social cohesion discussed above.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review**

Studies will be included on the basis of whether they evaluate a policy intervention that aims to affect social cohesion as conceptualized above, at the community-level or higher. The geographic scope is limited to sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is the site of a significant share of such programming. Also, findings from Africa must be conditioned upon the extraordinary ethnic diversity present in many African countries as well as the low level of development in many African communities. The temporal scope is limited to post-1995, the year of the Copenhagen Declaration that mainstreamed social cohesion programming.

We will include studies that measure the social cohesion effects of various programs quantitatively and/or qualitatively. All research designs will be included in the preliminary bibliography. Relevance decisions will be made by examining the titles and abstracts first, and then consulting the actual paper if necessary. The two researchers will evaluate results of various searches (described below) independently. If there is disagreement on inclusion, the researchers will consult with each other until consensus reached, tending to err on side of inclusion. Any contested articles (whether ultimately included or not) will be clearly listed. These relevance decisions will be used to create a complete bibliography.

Studies with experimental or quasi-experimental delineation of treatment and control groups will be included in the review to collect measures of program effects. This corresponds with applying a cut-off of Level Three from the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (SMS). Studies that do not include such delineation will also be consulted to provide insight on potential mechanisms and possible sources of bias.

Examples of studies to be included:

Fearon et al (2008). This study evaluates the social cohesion effects of a randomized community-directed reconstruction intervention undertaken over 2 years in eastern Liberia by the International Rescue Committee. The study uses behavioral games as a method for evaluating social cohesion effects. The researchers find evidence of increased social cohesion in the communities that received the intervention compared to those that did not. Pronyk et al (2008). The study evaluates an intervention undertaken over 2 years in South Africa by the authors themselves. The researchers randomly assigned microfinance and training programs to villages. The study used various behavioral, survey, and qualitative data to evaluate the effects of the intervention. They find evidence of positive effects on social capital.

Examples of studies to be excluded:

Cornelissen and Horstmeier (2002). This is an empirical study of established and emerging identities in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The investigation shows that rather than developing social cohesion as sought by the post-apartheid government, identities continue to be constructed in polarized ways around local neighborhoods and long-existing class, ethnic and racial cleavages. Although this article deals with social cohesion in Africa, it will be excluded because it does not specifically examine an intervention.

Bjorkman and Svensson (2007). This paper presents a randomized field experiment to examine community-based monitoring. It finds that communities that more extensively monitor health care providers improve both the quality and quantity of health service delivery. Although this study examines an intervention in Africa in a methodologically rigorous way and includes a discussion of social cohesion, monitoring and social cohesion are considered independent or intervening variables to achieve health care improvements, rather than the outcome variable of the intervention.

### **3.2. Search Strategy**

Our search strategy will begin with electronic searches of a number of databases. We expect to consult Social Science Research Network (SSRN); Social sciences citation index (SSCI); Social sciences full text; Web of Science; Jolis; Cambridge journals online; British Library for Development Studies (BLDS); IDEAS Economics and Finance Research; ScienceDirect; Sage full-text collections; C2 SPECTR; ERIC; and ChildData. We will identify other relevant databases in consultation with a research librarian at Columbia University.

The keyword/topic combinations to be searched include: "social cohesion" Africa; "social capital" intervention Africa; "community based development" Africa. Again, we will consult with a research librarian to elaborate. As noted above, we will restrict the temporal scope to post-1995, the year of the Copenhagen Declaration that mainstreamed social cohesion programming.

In the first instance, a research assistant will search bibliographic databases. Searches will be systematically recorded, without making any selection amongst results. Search results will be grouped by the sources through which they were identified (with keyword/topic combinations listed), and listed with bibliographic information and abstracts (where applicable). Database searches will be complimented by manual back-searching in bibliographies of identified studies and journals by the reviewers and research assistant. Given the likely 'grey' (unpublished) nature of much work in this field, we also expect to identify contacts and literature via 'snowballing' techniques (following one link that leads to another), through use of list-servs and the internet (see appendix for call to list-servs). We plan to make contact by email with individuals working in this field. We will also search Google and Google Scholar. We also anticipate participating in the 2009 *Perspectives on Impact Evaluation* conference (Cairo) in order to identify further contacts, studies, and potential gaps.

To the extent possible, we will take an international perspective when searching the literature. The list-servs, experts with whom we will make contact, and several databases, are international. We will include studies in English and in French; these are the dominant international languages in Africa, the operational languages of the key implementing agencies, and the working languages of the reviewers. We believe that most of the relevant research is written in these languages.

### **3.3. Description of methods used in primary research**

Based on studies that have been identified already, we can provide some basic information on the types of methods used in the primary research. Of course, the final review will provide a more thorough assessment. We have already discussed how the types of interventions vary considerably. Putting that aside for the moment, from a methodological standpoint, the most salient differences are in the ways that interventions are assigned and treatment effects are measured.

With respect to intervention assignment, the Fearon et al (2008) and Pronyk et al (2008), mentioned above, are randomized, and are thus as close as possible to the experimental ideal in the field. Nonetheless, we expect that some of the studies that fall within our search criteria will examine interventions assigned through vaguely understood processes. These would include cases where interventions were assigned by national governments, NGOs, or development agencies on the basis of need or political priority. The way that we will deal with the latter is to look at whether intervention effects are measured after conditioning on potential confounders. A list of such confounding factors will be identified after a first pass through the articles that are included in the review. We will then systematically assess whether confounding based on such factors is a likely threat to validity. Note that such an approach is also necessary in most randomized interventions. The ideal properties of randomization are only realized in expectation. Randomized interventions rarely include sufficient numbers of clusters to realize these ideal properties. With respect to measures of treatment effects, we have already discussed above how social cohesion can be measured in behavioral and attitudinal terms. In addition, behavioral measures and attitudinal measures can take different forms. For example with respect to behavioral measures, Fearon et al (2008) report findings from behavioral games that were

specifically designed to assess changes in social cohesion. The game results indicate positive treatment effects. However, the same study also used a series of survey based measures of “real world” behaviors (e.g. the initiation of new local community projects), and there, the patterns were on the whole weaker, and at times inconsistent (personal communication with authors). We expect that this kind of variation in outcome measures is likely to multiply significantly as we move across studies. As such, our strategy is to list of the various types of measures that have been used and report results associated with each of these measures (more details below). A “results matrix” will provide some indication of the noisiness of the measures and also whether the measures are tapping into different dimensions of social cohesion. As mentioned above, qualitative information from the studies will be used to contextualize the quantitative findings. Once we have a complete list of studies in hand, we will consider categories over which studies can be grouped and meaningfully synthesized. This may be by intervention type (e.g. Paluck and Green 2009), but more likely by outcome measures: inter-personal attitudinal, inter-personal behavioral, inter-group attitudinal, and inter-group behavioral.

### **3.4. Criteria for determination of independent findings**

We will employ standard approaches to dealing with the “multiple outcome problem” in quantitative studies. These include p-value adjustment to account for the number of tests and designation of primary endpoint measures. The selection of primary endpoint measures depends on a number of practical and theoretical considerations. In our case, we are interested in the effects of interventions on real world social cohesion behaviors and attitudes. After compiling a list of studies to include and reviewing the employed outcome measures, we will determine whether it is feasible to designate some behavioral and attitudinal measures as primary.

### **3.5. Details of study coding categories**

Our review will use the qualitative discussions in the write-ups of the primary studies to identify potential moderating factors. We will then assess the extent to which these moderating factors may contribute to heterogeneity in measured effects from one study to another. For each study, we will code the following: (i) the quality of study design – based, most likely, on the Maryland SMS scale; (ii) the type of intervention – based on the classifications that we derive, as discussed above; (iii) the types of effect measures that are employed, with associated effect estimates; (iv) the study’s degree of sensitivity to a list of identified confounders; (v) socio-economic attributes of the population on which the study was conducted; and (vi) whether those who carried out the study determined that the intervention was effective.

### **3.6. Statistical procedures and conventions**

To the extent possible, we will project quantitative treatment effect estimates onto a common scale: change in the rate of “socially cohesive” behavior/attitudes attributed to the treatment. We choose this metric because it allows us to measure change in a manner that controls for baseline rates and for the size of the samples/populations in the study. These scaled results will be entered into the results matrix described above, with results ordered on the basis of their status of primary or secondary measures, also described above. The quality of the results will be assessed with respect to sensitivity to potential biases, using the list of potential confounders as a guide (see above).

Once the results matrix sensitivity assessments are completed, we will determine what kind of quantitative synthesis is possible and appropriate. Criteria for determining what kind of quantitative synthesis should be done include the following considerations:

- (i) Whether comparable measures are employed by some reasonable number of studies. Typically, meta-analyses include at least three studies, but a proper determination of the number of studies required depends on the number of potentially confounding factors. This will be assessed after a first pass through the studies.
- (ii) Whether population features that are not (or cannot be) controlled-for in producing outcome estimates are sufficiently minor to allow meaningful comparisons to be made.

If sets of effect measures satisfy these criteria, then the core of the review will be the results matrix and the assessment of sensitivity to potential biases. For any sets of effect measures that satisfy these criteria, we will plot results to illustrate general patterns and heterogeneity in effects. Meta-analysis will be limited to plots of effect estimates, following guidelines proposed in Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (2009). We will use the R software package to produce the plots. We do not plan to conduct any pooled statistical analyses – i.e. we do not plan to reanalyze the original datasets using a common, hierarchical statistical model. The project time line is too short to acquire the datasets, and then design and conduct such an analysis. As such no adjustments will be made to attempt to remove bias from effect estimates, although we may set out some guidelines on how this could be done in the future. Rather, we will assess results based on whether they were derived conditional on potential sources of bias. We will study whether published and unpublished results tend to differ significantly, as a test for publication bias.

### **3.7. Treatment of qualitative research**

We anticipate qualitative findings to be reported alongside quantitative findings and, at times, to be used as the sole evaluation method in some studies that are accepted based on our inclusion/exclusion criteria. The latter will be considered for inclusion based on the same criteria as outlined above, and the same considerations with respect to assessing methods and determination of independent findings (with the exception of p-value adjustment, of course) will be applied. Such studies will be entered into the results matrix as short summaries of findings, rather than as changes in rates of socially cohesive behavior/attitudes. We will also use the qualitative findings to identify unmeasured factors and other reasons that might help to explain heterogeneity in results.

### **3.8. Review Team**

King and Samii will work collaboratively at all stages of the review. King works on issues at the intersection of development, conflict and peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a special focus on social cohesion and fragmentation. Her research is the subject of several conference papers, articles, and a doctoral dissertation. Samii has studied the effects of post-conflict peacebuilding programs in Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Nepal. The research currently appears in a series of working papers, commissioned evaluations, and a dissertation in progress. They will also hire a research assistant with a strong background in the social sciences.

Both King and Samii have undergone research skills training and have experience with information retrieval for major research projects. Our respective methodological expertise will be complimentary. King has expertise in using qualitative methods to design and

analyze development and peacebuilding interventions. In contrast, Samii has expertise in using statistical models to design and analyze development and peacebuilding interventions. Samii is also a statistical consultant for the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy at Columbia University, assisting faculty and students in the design and analysis of various experiments and observational studies.

#### **4. Timeframe**

Searches for published and unpublished studies, relevance assessments: 3/13/09	Through
Extraction of data from research reports, statistical analysis: 3/27/09	Through
Oral presentation of preliminary findings (Cairo conference):	3/31 – 4/2/09
Preparation of draft report:	Through 4/30/09
Submission of draft report:	4/30/09
Submission of final report:	7/30/09
Dissemination (possibly African Studies Association, World Bank and UNDP): 12/31/09	Through

#### **5. Updating the Review**

We plan to publish a complete bibliography of studies gathered for this review on our personal web pages. We will issue a call for updates annually on major list -servs and update our list. We will consider applying for funding in five years to systematically update this review.

#### **6. Acknowledgments**

We would like to acknowledge Travis Coulter, Macartan Humphreys, Malte Leirl, Revati Prasad, Howard White, and the numerous others who replied to our listserv calls, for the input that they provided as we designed this protocol.

#### **7. Statement Concerning Conflict of Interest**

The authors are not aware of any conflict of interest, financial or otherwise, that may influence the objectivity of the review.

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## **APPENDIX 1: CALL TO LIST-SERVS**

SUBJECT: Review of Studies on Social Cohesion Interventions

BODY: Dear colleagues,

We are conducting a meta-analysis-type review of studies on social cohesion interventions in the developing world, with a particular emphasis on programs in sub-Saharan Africa.

We call on researchers to provide references to relevant research or evaluations that they have done or with which they are familiar. NB: We are interested in references to both published AND unpublished research.

Social cohesion interventions include a variety of programs. Some examples are as follows:

- Local participatory governance interventions that aim to organize public goods provision.
- Educational or media-based interventions that aim to promote cooperation across polarized groups.
- NGO programs that aim to assist in the reintegration of returned displacees or combatants in communities with histories of polarization or atomization.
- Other interventions that aim to build social capital.

The studies or evaluations should include analysis of social cohesion outcomes (either behavioral outcomes or attitudinal). They can examine one intervention/project or more. We are particularly, but not solely, interested in studies with experimental or quasi-experimental delineation of treatment and control groups.

Please send references/citations to:

[cds81@columbia.edu](mailto:cds81@columbia.edu)

At this point, we are casting a wide net. Criteria for inclusion in the final review will be refined as we get a better sense of the types of studies that have been conducted.

Apologies for any cross-postings.

Many thanks,

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