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CAN MEDIATION REDUCE VIOLENCE?

The Effects of Negotiation Training for Local Leaders in North Central Nigeria

APRIL 2022

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Executive Summary

In numerous inter-communal conflicts around the world, local leaders are relied upon to help mediate and resolve disputes. In more remote areas, the state may not be present, and local leaders are often trusted more than other actors due to their knowledge of and connections with communities. Consequently, peacebuilding interventions often focus on local leaders as a key element to prevent or curb violence.

Yet little is understood about the effectiveness of interventions that support local leaders in their efforts to resolve disputes. Few evaluations of these programs have a comparison group, so it is unclear if the additional support that leaders receive helps them become more successful in resolving disputes. There is also little understanding of how these interventions benefit not just the leaders receiving the intervention and the disputants, but the overall community. Do communities see changes in security and social cohesion as a result of leaders receiving mediation and negotiation training?

To answer these questions, we conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) of a peacebuilding program in North Central Nigeria. The USAID-funded Communities Initiative for Peace Program (CIPP) addresses the proximate and root causes of violence in the region, including farmer-herder conflict, which account for a significant proportion of violence in Nigeria today. The program provides mediation training for local leaders, convenes dialogues between communities and policymakers, and engages in radio and social media interventions.

Methodology

We randomly assigned 88 communities in Benue, Kogi and Plateau states to either receive a mediation training intervention or serve as a comparison group. Leaders of 44 communities were trained in Interest-Based Mediation and Negotiation (IBMN) and 44 other communities were assigned to the comparison group, where leaders continued to resolve disputes the way they had in the past. We surveyed 662 leaders across intervention and comparison sites to see how strongly they felt about their dispute resolution skills, their perceptions of violence and security, and the degree of cohesion they felt with one another

We also surveyed a random sample of 4,013 households within the intervention and comparison communities. We asked community members about how satisfied they were with their leaders' dispute resolution skills, their perceptions of violence and security in their communities, and the amount of social cohesion they felt with members of the groups with whom they had the most conflict. These were typically farmers if a respondent was a herder, or vice versa; however, in some areas conflicts were primarily between farmers. We tested to see if the intervention affected various groups differently and did not find any consistent statistically significant differences across gender, livelihood, or age groups.

Results

We found that mediation training had a positive effect on both leaders and their communities. As expected, leaders who received the training felt they had stronger conflict resolution skills, perceived fewer violent events, felt there was greater security in their communities, and rated their interactions with leaders from the conflicting group more positively than those who did not receive the training.

We saw similar results for communities. While intergroup violence had decreased overall in Benue, Kogi, and Plateau, we saw a sharper decrease of violence in communities where leaders were trained in mediation. Twenty-nine percent of participants who lived in communities whose leaders received the mediation training reported that they experienced a violent incident in the last six months, compared to 55% of participants in comparison sites. Participants in the intervention communities also reported feeling more secure. They were more likely to walk around their communities and less likely to avoid certain areas than

those in comparison communities. They were also more likely to interact economically and socially with members of the conflicting group and report being more satisfied with their leaders' dispute resolution skills. All of these differences were statistically significant.

However, for both leaders and community members, the mediation training did not have a statistically significant effect on intergroup trust. While the intervention appears to have made a dramatic shift in perceptions of security, it had less of an effect on improving social cohesion. Based on these results, we speculate that mediation interventions are useful for preventing and stopping violence but may have less direct or slower effects on strengthening relations between communities.

Recommendations

Invest in improving the mediation capabilities of local leaders: Preventing and stopping violence is a top priority for many peacebuilding programs. Our results indicate that local leaders, with the right tools, can be effective at reducing violence and improving security – and these results can be realized relatively quickly. We also show that mediation interventions not only yield benefits for trained leaders and the disputants they help, but for the broader community as well. This illustrates the potential scale of these types of interventions, where reaching a few people cascades to many. Moreover, these interventions are relatively cost-effective. In this context, training and mentoring 340 leaders over the course of a year cost approximately USD 60,000. Alternative methods for securing communities, such as expanding policing or other forms of security, are much more expensive. Based on this promising evidence and low cost, donors should increase their investments in enhancing the skills of local leaders to resolve conflicts, particularly in areas where state presence is weak.

Pair peacebuilding interventions that halt violence with interventions that build trust between groups: Violent conflict has multiple drivers. The underlying causes of conflict are based on structural, social, and institutional inequities, as well as the social and psychological factors that foment mistrust and make conflict difficult to resolve. Proximate causes—such as land encroachments or elections—often trigger violence. In the results presented here, we see that mediation interventions were effective at addressing proximate causes of conflict, but did less in changing underlying causes, such as a lack of cohesion between groups. Stopping violence is extremely valuable in its own right, but it also provides opportunities for other interventions that address underlying causes of conflict to be implemented. Moreover, if violence is not quelled while trying to implement interventions aimed at social cohesion or other structural factors, there is a risk of losing gains in these other areas. For example, an eruption of violence may increase mistrust or prevent service delivery to certain communities. Therefore, we recommend that donors and implementers combine interventions that stop violence, like mediation training, with ones that address the underlying causes of conflict in areas with active violence.

Consider phasing in various peacebuilding interventions. Rather than conducting all activities at once, particularly in contexts with active conflict, prioritizing mediation and other methods for directly reducing violence first may provide the most immediate benefit to communities. With more security, community members may then feel safer to engage in other peacebuilding activities that require deeper contact with other groups and be able to focus on addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. Also, with more stability, such activities are less likely to be derailed due to upticks in violence. For donors, this may require considering how these types of interventions have different "spend rates" and plan accordingly. This would help reduce the pressure on implementers to start all activities at once. Moreover, implementers may want to consider designing workplans that sequence activities so that those focused on stopping violence are implemented first. While there is often a feedback loop linking violence and social cohesion, stopping violence first may be more likely to create a "quick win," while cohesion activities may take longer to produce tangible results.

Introduction

High-intensity military conflicts tend to receive overwhelming attention from the media, diplomats and politicians. Yet persistent low-intensity conflicts—such as intercommunal disputes over land and resources in South Sudan, Yemen and Nigeria—take a considerable toll in terms of lives, economic productivity, and access to basic services, such as healthcare and education. For example, the conflict related to Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria often receives more attention from donors and reporters, yet in recent years, more lives were lost due to violence in the Middle Belt of Nigeria between farmers and herders (ICG, 2018). Beyond the human cost, conflict in the Middle Belt has cost the Nigerian economy $13 billion (McDougal et al., 2015). As long as these intercommunal divides remain, elites will be able to manipulate them to foster larger-scale conflicts, as we have seen not only in Nigeria (Lichtenheld & Ogbudu, 2021) but also in South Sudan (Krause, 2019), Kenya (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015), Ethiopia (Demissie & Soliman, 2021; Yusuf, 2019), Bosnia (Power, 2002), and Iraq (Al-Qarawee, 2014).

These types of intercommunal disputes are often mediated and resolved by local leaders rather than the state since local leaders, such as traditional, youth, and women leaders, are often trusted more than state officials to address intercommunal tensions (Logan, 2009). Local leaders' intimate knowledge of their own communities and ties with out-group leaders often facilitate dispute resolution (Baldwin 2016; Baldwin & Raffler 2019). Additionally, many communities—particularly the farther an area is from district, municipality, or regional population centers (Mustasilta, 2018; Henn, 2021)—suffer from a lack of state presence and need to rely more on local leaders for numerous services, including dispute resolution.

As a result, peacebuilding interventions regularly target local leaders with training and mentoring intended to improve dispute resolution in areas where state presence is minimal (IPI, 2020). Yet few rigorous studies have examined the extent to which these interventions improve dispute resolution and reduce violence. Most evaluations use pre-post or qualitative methods to examine the effectiveness of such interventions and do not compare outcomes between those who do and those who not receive the intervention (Social Impact, 2014). The challenge here is that without a counterfactual, it is hard to know if local leaders who do not receive these trainings are just as effective at resolving disputes as those who receive them. Another shortcoming of previous evaluations of these interventions is that they focus exclusively on either changes in behavior among the mediators or on benefits to the disputants directly involved in a mediation—without measuring the effects on the broader community (i.e., *Peace Writ Large*) (Social Impact, 2014; 3ie, 2015).

To address this gap in the evidence, Mercy Corps partnered with Pastoral Resolve (PARE) to conduct a randomized control trial (RCT) of the mediation component of the USAID-funded Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP*)* program in North Central Nigeria. The study, conducted in the states of Plateau, Kogi, and Benue, investigates whether training of local leaders can improve security and trust in communities affected by conflict.

The Context: North Central Nigeria

Nigeria's ethnically and religiously diverse northern region is experiencing violence that is splintering communities. Farmers from various ethnic groups and herders (pastoralists)—who are largely ethnically Fulani and often nomadic or semi-sedentary—have a long history of conflict. However, these tensions had intensified due to a combination of 1) climate change, which is reducing the amount of arable or grazable land and water resources; 2) more people migrating into the north central region due to increasingly arid land farther north; 3) a greater number of people using a smaller amount of available land, intensifying resource competition; and 4) population shifts, changing people's minority vs. majority status. Moreover, the fact that the farmer-herder divide overlaps with Muslim-Christian divides exacerbates intergroup tensions,

deepening these fault lines and increasing the risk of elites mobilizing people based on their identity for protests, rioting and violence (Lichtenheld & Ogbudu, 2021).

In addition to farmer-herder conflict, other violence afflicts Northern Nigeria. Sunni-Shia tensions continue to rise, with recent demonstrations and violence across Abuja and other areas in the north. Organized crime and banditry also are on the rise. All this has raised fears that violent extremist groups will gain traction in the northwest and north central region, further heightening feelings of insecurity. The state's response to these issues has contributed to some of the violence. For example, the Anti-Open Grazing law passed in Benue in 2017 was perceived as biased against pastoralists and resulted in an uptick in violence for a number of months, as well as significant population displacement. These dynamics contribute to new waves of violence, property destruction, sexual and gender-based violence, and further displacement. For example, escalating violence between farmers and herders in 2018 killed over 1,949 people, six times more than the previous year (Ilo et al., 2019).

CIPP Program Description and Mediation Intervention

To address the proximate and root causes of this violence, Mercy Corps, with partners Pastoral Resolve (PARE), Interfaith Mediation Center (IMC), Africa Radio Drama Association (ARDA), and Savannah Center for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), is implementing the USAID-funded Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) program.[1] The CIPP program covers six states in Nigeria's North Central and North West regions: Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kogi, Benue, and Plateau.

The goal of the CIPP program is to *promote peaceful coexistence and stability in Nigeria.* Through an integrated design to mitigate violent conflict across the six targeted states, the consortium aims to 1) address the proximate causes of violence by strengthening conflict prevention, mediation, and early warning processes and 2) address the root causes by linking conflict mitigation and development initiatives. To achieve these goals and purposes, the consortium implements a range of activities, including training leaders to improve their mediation skills; conducting inter-ethnic, inter-religious, and policy dialogues; and designing and airing social media campaigns and radio programming.

Prior to the CIPP program, Mercy Corps implemented various peacebuilding programs in North Central Nigeria across Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau states. As part of the Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria (ECPN), another USAID-funded program, Mercy Corps conducted a RCT to measure the effectiveness of interventions, which included training leaders in mediation and joint projects between farmers and herders. While the results were quite strong overall, we were left with some questions specifically about the impact of the mediation training.

To train leaders to become more effective mediators, Mercy Corps has adopted the Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation (IBNM) training, which Mercy Corps has used in numerous countries around the world since 2004, including Iraq, Myanmar, Kenya, Jordan, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Colombia, Tajikistan, Ethiopia, and Mali. Interest-based negotiation is a method of negotiation training in which parties are encouraged to find mutually acceptable outcomes by meeting all parties' interests (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 2011). In the CIPP program, the training consisted of bringing local leaders—including traditional, religious, youth, opinion, and women leaders—together for a three-day training in IBNM.

The theory posits that if people negotiate from their positions— "I want the whole orange," for example—it becomes a zero-sum game. By negotiating from interests—*why* people want the orange—parties can get

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[1] The CIPP program builds on previous interventions in North Central Nigeria, including the *Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria* (ECPN) program, also funded by USAID and implemented by Mercy Corps and PARE.

what they want, and there are opportunities for win-win (i.e., positive sum) solutions. Following a set of criteria that prioritizes leaders' interest in conflict management and peacebuilding, we identified approximately eight local leaders per community to receive the training.

In communities where the primary conflict type was between farmers and herders, we selected approximately four leaders from each group to attend the training together. To ensure the leaders were representative of the community, women and youth leaders were also selected. Trainings were conducted between December 2019 and March 2020, covering a total of 340 local leaders across three states.

Mercy Corps' partner organization, PARE, led the process of selecting local leaders to participate in the IBNM training. We relied on existing leadership structures where possible, triangulating across community members to identify those individuals with influence and experience in dispute resolution. PARE selected leaders by grading candidates on a set of seven criteria, including their commitment to the project's aims, their communication and analytical skills, as well as diversity and inclusion.

Photo Credit: C. Reardon

Local Leaders in Kogi State Participate in an IBNM training workshop, March 2020

Motivation and Hypotheses

Evidence and Evidence Gaps on Peacebuilding Interventions with Local Leaders

Evidence about what works in peacebuilding has grown over the past decade (JPAL/IPA, 2021). Specifically, much has been learned about the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of interventions that aim to build social cohesion among communities, often considered "bottom-up" or peace consolidation interventions (Matanock, 2021). For example, both social contact and Community Driven Development (CDD) are often incorporated into peacebuilding programs (3ie, 2018). Recent evidence shows that contact between groups in conflict and post-conflict contexts generally have positive effects, particularly on changing behaviors (Scacco & Warren, 2018; Mousa, 2020; Paler et al., 2020). In contrast, the effects of CDD on social cohesion are generally more limited (for reviews, see Casey, 2018 and 3ie, 2018).

Many peacebuilding programs also focus on preventing violence from erupting (i.e., conflict management). Most of the interventions aimed at stopping violence tend to be more "top-down" in nature, with government officials or leaders intervening. However, these types of interventions are more difficult for researchers to evaluate using counterfactuals, as the number of units or people receiving the intervention is often smaller (Matanock, 2021). The areas where there tends to be more evidence for these top-down interventions are in peacekeeping (Fortna, 2004; Howard, 2019; Blair, 2020) and policing (Blair et al., 2021; IPA/JPAL, 2021).

Informal mechanisms for managing conflicts and preventing violence, which are common in fragile environments where state presence is weak, have received less attention empirically, and even less experimentally.[2] Previous studies on mediation have focused on a mass education program in Liberia, where people learned mediation and nonviolence communication skills. While there is evidence that the intervention reduced violence and shifted social norms related to dispute resolution in targeted communities, even in the long term, people did not report increased mediation skills (Blattman, Hartman and Blair 2014; Hartman, Blair and Blattman 2021).

A recent study of the USAID-funded ECPN program, which was implemented by Mercy Corps and PARE, examined the effectiveness of interventions that targeted social cohesion (i.e., social contact and CDD) and interventions that prevented or stopped violence (i.e., training leaders in mediation) (Dawop et al., 2018). That study found indicative evidence that the contact and CDD elements of the program—largely the joint projects—influenced relationships between farmers and pastoralists. Specifically, farmers and pastoralists in ECPN communities had more contact and trusted each other more than those in comparison communities. Those in the targeted communities were also found to feel more secure.

While the ECPN program had numerous positive results, the benefits were not attributed to the mediation aspects of the intervention. Few respondents were aware of the mediation intervention and people did not report dispute resolution improving in their communities. This was surprising, given the observed changes in perceptions of security and that the mediation training was the component of the intervention that would be expected to most directly affect levels of violence. There are several plausible explanations for this disconnect. One potential reason community members did not attribute the change in security to the mediation component was that since disputes did not escalate, community members were less aware of them. As a result, if community members were not aware of them, they likely also did not hear how they

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[2] There is a long history in the organizational behavior literature of studying negotiation behavior in the laboratory rather than the field. See Bazerman & Moore (2013) and Thompson (2019) for reviews. There is also a limited number of field studies on negotiation behavior focused on how it improves household dynamics rather than mediation and peacebuilding (see Ashraf et al., 2020).

were resolved. If this was the case, then a lack of attribution was actually a sign of success. Alternatively, it could be that the mediation component was not effective and the contact-based interventions built enough trust to improve perceptions of security.

One reason for combining mediation with more contact-based interventions is that they address different aspects of conflict dynamics. Mediation is often used to stop violence from erupting or quell violence after it has already erupted, so that people can engage in everyday activities like going to school, accessing markets, and tending crops. Contact-based interventions look to address aspects of social cohesion by building trust so that people are able to cooperate and improve their attitudes about other groups (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). While the combination of these interventions has a compelling logic, the evidence behind it remains weak.

Due to these gaps and remaining puzzles, Mercy Corps implemented a follow-up RCT that isolated the effects of mediation training from the other contact-based and CDD-type interventions that were part of the program. We examined the training of leaders in mediation in three states where CIPP has worked: Plateau, Benue, and Kogi. During the first year of the program in these states, no other community-level interventions were implemented.[3]

Hypotheses

In this study, we examine two sets of hypotheses. The first set of hypotheses (H1 through H3b) focuses on leaders.

First, did the mediation training shift leaders' dispute resolution skills? While leaders resolve disputes in communities that receive the training as well as those that do not (called comparison communities here), we wanted to learn whether the training made any difference in how successful the leaders were in dispute resolution. This is also in essence a "manipulation check" to see if the training worked. If we do not see a shift in skills, then it would be difficult to attribute any community-level changes to the mediation training. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H1: Leaders who are trained in mediation report stronger dispute resolution skills.

Because the training sessions were joint—with farmer and pastoralist leaders learning together— we also wanted to know if this contact would lead to more social cohesion between the leaders of these groups. Other training interventions, though not specifically on mediation training, have resulted in more cooperative behaviors between those who participated in mixed group sessions, though they produced no change in attitudes (Scacco & Warren, 2018). Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H2: Leaders who are trained in mediation report more social cohesion than leaders who do not receive the mediation training.

One reason we focus the training on leaders is that community members approach them to help them resolve conflicts. The training should help leaders be more effective in resolving conflicts, both because they are able to find a good solution that parties find fair and because more people come to them with their disputes. As a result, leaders would see less violence in their communities. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H3a: Leaders who are trained in mediation report fewer violent events than leaders who don't receive the mediation training.

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[3] However, LGA and State-level activities were implemented that would affect these communities.

H3b: Leaders who are trained in mediation have higher perceptions of security in their communities than leaders who don't receive the mediation training.

Our second set of hypotheses (H4a through H6) focuses on the community. That leaders are able to help disputants resolve conflicts more peacefully is critically important, but we also wanted to know if being more effective at resolving disputes had an impact on the broader community. Would people notice that disputes were not escalating into violence? Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H4a: In communities where leaders were trained in mediation, community members report fewer violent events than community members whose leaders did not receive mediation training.

H4b: In communities where leaders were trained in mediation, community members will have higher perceptions of security than community members whose leaders did not receive mediation training.

We also explored whether people would attribute changes in security to improved dispute resolution from their leaders. In Mercy Corps' previous study, participants did not become more satisfied with their leaders' dispute resolution skills. There are a number of examples of government service providers improving objective measures without corresponding shifts in perceptions of services, including community policing in Colombia (Blattman et al., forthcoming) and infrastructure investment in South Africa (de Kadt & Lieberman 2017). So it may be that mediators were effective objectively, as measured by researchers, even if it was not perceived by the community. At the same time, because the previous investigation combined numerous interventions, we wondered if community members would recognize that leaders were focused on dispute resolution. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H5: In communities where leaders were trained in mediation, community members report more satisfaction with dispute resolution mechanisms than community members whose leaders did not receive mediation training.

Lastly, we wanted to investigate if more cohesion would be built at the community level if there were fewer violent incidents as a result of leaders resolving disputes more effectively. Fewer violent events might create more opportunities for trade and other positive interactions as well as fewer events that could feed into negative stereotypes and prejudices (Littman & Paluck, 2015). Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H6: In communities where leaders were trained in mediation, community members report more social cohesion than community members whose leaders did not receive mediation training.

Study Design and Methodology

We evaluate the effects of the Interest-Based Mediation and Negotiation (IBMN) training using a RCT.[4] The RCT was conducted in three states across North Central Nigeria: Plateau, Benue, and Kogi (Figure 1). We evaluate outcomes at the leader level and the community level. To this end, we conducted a baseline survey between September and October 2019, followed by an endline survey between March and May 2021. We also conducted a survey of leaders selected for the IBMN trainings as well as an additional sample of leaders that were part of a comparison group.

Figure 1. Location of Plateau, Benue, and Kogi States within Nigeria

Selection of Communities and Sampling Protocol

To identify locations for the intervention, we conducted a scoping exercise with help from our partner organization, PARE, to determine whether communities had a demonstrated need based on the level of violence they were experiencing. Communities suffering from medium to high levels of violence were included in the initial sample. We defined "demonstrated need" as the communities having engaged in violent clashes within one year of the scoping exercise. Through the scoping exercise, we identified a total of 152 communities.

Each of our sites included one farmer community and one pastoralist community, if that was the primary conflict dynamic. This was determined by trained enumerators from PARE. In order to guard against potential spillover, we combined communities that were geographically close to each other as one "site." After follow-up interviews and visits, we narrowed our sample to 133 potential sites.[5] Next, we randomly

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[4] For the full methodological appendix, please visit https://www.mercycorps.org/negotiation-training-appendix. See Appendix 4 for more details on how we addressed ethical considerations of conducting this study in an active conflict zone during a pandemic.

[5] In some cases, sites included more than one village depending on the relevant conflicting groups. For example, during the scoping exercise, we determined which were the primary conflict points. If they were between farmers and herders in nearby villages, we combined those villages into one site to be assigned either to receive the training program or not.

assigned the intervention—mediation training—to 44 sites across the three states. We then assigned another 44 sites to the comparison (i.e., control) group. An additional 45 sites were randomized to a third "buffer" group, which did not receive any training activities during the period of the RCT, but which are geographically close to intervention communities and could have inadvertently been exposed to the program.

Prior to the intervention, we conducted a baseline survey with approximately 2,500 randomly selected individuals from intervention and comparison communities. The baseline survey was conducted between September and October 2019. Households were selected using the Random Walk procedure, starting at a central location in the community. This involved first mapping the community and numbering each household with chalk. Following the mapping exercise, team leaders randomly selected households using a random number generator. After identifying all household members age 18 and above, respondents within households were randomly selected to participate in the survey. Attempts were made to match enumerators and respondents along gender and ethnic lines.

For the endline survey, we used similar methods to select households. We conducted the endline survey from March to April 2021, collecting responses from a total of 4,013 households.

As mentioned above, we identified potential leaders to take part in the training intervention based on set criteria and a graded assessment, conducted by trained enumerators from our partner organization, PARE. The goal was to include a diverse array of leaders—not only traditional chiefs. As such, we targeted youth, religious, women, and community leaders alongside traditional chiefs from each sampled community. In order to assess the effect of the training on leader-level outcomes, we also identified an additional sample of leaders from our comparison communities. The same process for selecting leaders in the intervention communities was used for the comparison communities. Leaders who consented to be part of the data collection were then included in the study. In total, 657 leaders make up the sample, of which 340 were trained and 317 were assigned to the comparison group.

Analytic Strategy

We used a difference-in-means estimation strategy to examine the effects of the training program on our outcomes of interest.[6] The unit of analysis for this study is the community.[7] Leaders were also clustered at the community level to control for the fact that they were trained together and would have contact with one another. As such, all analyses are conducted using robust standard errors clustered at the community level.

We have balance across the main outcomes of interest and most relevant covariates across our intervention and comparison communities.[8] Our primary specification does not include covariates. We include the covariate-adjusted models in the appendix.[9]

Outcomes and Measures

We focused on three outcomes to assess the impact of the IBMN trainings: (1) reported violent events, (2) perceptions of insecurity, and (3) trust and cohesion. For violent events, people were asked if they witnessed a violent event in the past six months. For perceptions of insecurity, people were asked how safe

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[6] For more detail on the analytic strategy, see Appendix 1.

[7] As mentioned above, communities were at times combined to include one or more villages if the relevant conflicting groups lived in those villages. That is, community here can be considered a sampled site. We use the word community for ease of understanding.

[8] Results of the balance tests for leaders and citizens are reported in Appendix 2.

[9] Results for our primary specification and the covariate-adjusted models are available in Appendix 3.

they felt doing various activities. And for social cohesion, people were asked about how much they trusted and interacted with members of out-groups.

We also examined satisfaction with the dispute resolution process. We see this as more of a "manipulation check" to demonstrate that the leaders did, in fact, improve their skills. It also may be related to the main outcomes in two possible ways: 1) If people witness less violence, they may infer that dispute resolution processes are working and thus are more satisfied with it, or 2) because people are more satisfied with dispute resolution processes, violence is less likely to erupt. All outcomes were measured using surveys. Endline surveys were conducted nearly a year after the IBMN trainings were conducted.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Demographics

The general population endline survey sample was 44% female compared to 37% in the baseline survey. The average age of respondents was 40 years old, with a good balance across age groups. According to age groups, 26% of the respondents fell within the ages of 18-30, 57% between 31-50, and approximately 17% were elderly (above 50). This is balanced across all three states. The sample for the leader survey is more male and older than the general population survey: 26% of the sampled leaders are female, and the average age is 45.

The general population sample is primarily Christian, with nearly 70% of respondents reporting their religion as Christianity. Yet this varies across states, with Benue being primarily Christian. This is likely due to the anti-grazing law, passed in 2017, which forbade herders from grazing within the state. Most herders fled the state and now reside across the borders in Nasarawa state. The primary ethnic groups include the Fulani (28%), Tiv (33%), and Igala (15%). There are smaller numbers from the Berom, Agatu, and Irigwe ethnic groups. These groups provide a good representation of the different ethnic groups that reside in conflict "hotspots" in North Central Nigeria. Our respondents overwhelmingly hail from rural areas (90%) and approximately 77% of respondents live in communities consisting of fewer than 200 people. The most cited occupation was farming (54%). The second most common occupation was having a business (16%), while 11% of respondents reported being a herder.

General Conflict Situation

Overall, reported violent events decreased significantly across all states since the baseline survey. In the endline survey, 42% of respondents reported a violent conflict in the past six months compared to 89% of respondents in the baseline survey. This decrease maps onto the general narrative of violence decreasing during the months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet when asked if there had been any farmer-herder "issues," three-fourths (75%) of the sample reported yes, indicating that underlying problems between these groups remain.

There is significant variation across states in reported violence (Figure 2). Benue by far reported the highest levels of violence, with 72% of respondents citing a violent conflict in the last six months, compared to 33% in Kogi and 19% in Plateau. Residents in Benue also reported feeling the least secure, as compared to residents in Kogi and Plateau. For example, nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents in Benue reported feeling "Often" or "Always" unsafe walking in their communities, and 86% said they avoid going to certain

areas due to the group they have conflict with. One reason for the greater insecurity in Benue may be due to the continued displacement and grievances as a result of the 2017 anti-grazing law.

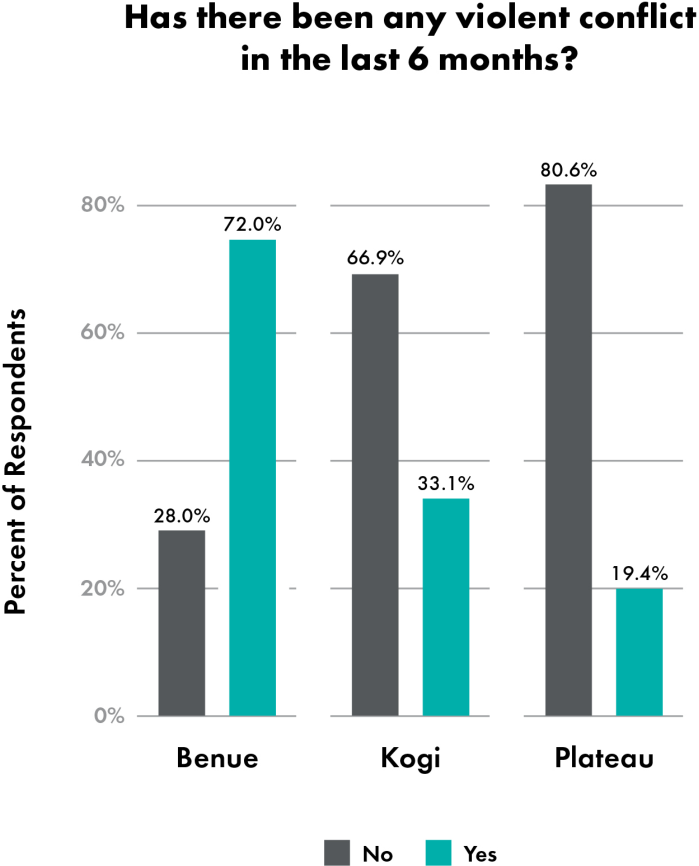

Figure 2. Community-Reported Violent Conflict, By State

Across all three states, the most frequently reported conflict type is between farmer and herders. In Benue and Kogi, respondents reported natural resources issues and violent crime as the second and third most common conflict types. In Plateau, on the other hand, respondents mentioned violent crime and armed gangs as the next two pressing concerns. This tracks with anecdotal accounts of the uptick in criminality and kidnappings across the state.

We found that different types of leaders resolve different types of disputes (Table 1). Traditional, youth, and civil society leaders tend to deal with farmer-herder and land disputes. A typical farmer-herder dispute often revolves around crop encroachment issues. Pastoralists graze their cattle along certain routes and access points looking for food and water. When a herder's livestock destroy or trample a portion of a farmer's crops or harvest, conflict can arise. In these cases, the typical process is negotiation regarding compensation for the damage, led by the village chief or other local leader. In contrast, religious, opinion, and women leaders focus more on intra-community, domestic or family disputes. Internal community disputes include disagreements over land or plot ownership, marital and domestic disputes, clashes between neighbors or friends, as well as money or business disagreements.

NUMBER	TRADITIONAL LEADERS	RELIGIOUS LEADERS	OPINION LEADERS
1	Land Disputes (63%)	Family/Domestic (70%)	Family/Domestic (59%)
2	Farmer-Herder (62%)	Farmer-Herder (32%)	Land Disputes (36%)
3	Family/Domestic (45%)	Religious (30%)	Money Disputes (26%)

NUMBER	WOMEN LEADERS	YOUTH LEADERS	CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS
1	Family/Domestic (72%)	Farmer-Herder (53%)	Farmer-Herder (59%)
2	Promise Fulfillment (34%)	Family/Domestic (40%)	Family/Domestic (52%)
3	Money Disputes (30%)	Land Disputes (34%)	Land Disputes (28%)

Table 1. Variation in Types of Disputes Addressed in Mediation, By Type of Leader

We also examined how much trust there is between groups (Figure 3). Overall, 82% of respondents reported *"No trust at all"* or *"Little trust,"* down from the baseline level of 90%. However, there is ample variation across states as shown in Figure 3. Understandably, given the level of reported violence, trust levels are the lowest in Benue. In addition, we asked various questions about people's interactions with members of the conflicting group. Overall, nearly half of the sample reported that they interacted with someone from the conflicting group outside the market, and 46% of those respondents reported those interactions as positive.

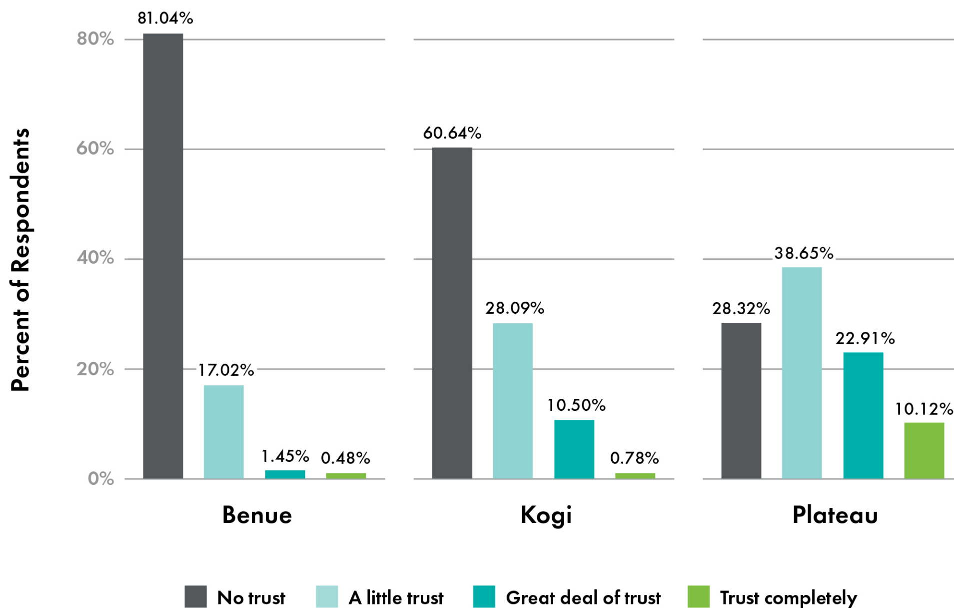

Figure 3. Trust in Conflicting Groups, By State

RCT Results

Based on the descriptive statistics outlined above, we cannot attribute any of the changes from the baseline to the endline to the IBNM training with this information alone. There have been many developments since 2019 which could have shifted violence, perceptions of insecurity, and trust in our sampled communities. To assess and isolate the effect of the IBMN training, we turn to the results of the RCT.

Leader Results

Confidence in Negotiation Skills

Overall, the trained leaders in the CIPP program reported they are more confident in their negotiation skills, feel more prepared to settle disputes, and perceive that the conflicting group leaders are more unbiased. On a scale of 1 to 5, trained leaders, on average, rated their skills as 4.1, while the comparison group rated their skills as only 3.1. These differences between trained and untrained leaders were highly statistically significant (*p-value < 0.001).* Similarly, when asked how prepared they feel to mediate disputes, trained leaders rated themselves at a 4.2. Comparison leaders hovered around 3 on a 5-point scale, which is a statistically significant difference at the 0.001 level. Trained leaders also reported a higher rate of resolved disputes: 89% reported that all or more than half of the disputes they handled end up resolved, compared to only 77% of comparison leaders. The differences in reported resolved disputes were statistically different from the leaders in the comparison group (*p-value = 0.04).* The training also appears to have improved leaders' perceptions of their counterparts from conflicting groups. This is arguably an important first step in negotiation and mediation between different groups. Trained leaders were more likely to believe out-group leaders will follow terms of an agreement (*p-value = 0.004),* that they cared about reducing violence for all involved (*p-value = 0.04),* and that they would negotiate in an unbiased manner (*p-value = 0.006).*

Social Cohesion

Leaders involved in the training reported socializing with conflicting group leaders more than comparison leaders, statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This could be from the shared experience of coming together for a similar training. While over 70% of the comparison leaders reported "Never" socializing with the conflicting group leaders, only 50% of the trained leaders report not socializing. Over half of the trained leaders reported socializing with conflicting group leaders at least once a month.

Violence and Perceptions of Insecurity

Lastly, there was a statistically significant difference in reported levels of violence between leaders who received training and those that did not (*p-value = 0.004).* Only 26% of leaders in intervention communities reported a violent event in the last six months. In contrast, comparison communities experienced much higher rates of reported violence, with 46% of leaders citing a violent event in the last six months.

Community-Level Results[10]

Awareness of Intervention

In the previous ECPN study, people were not aware of the meditation component, making it difficult to disentangle why security improved but perceptions of dispute resolution did not. Given that finding, we first tested if people knew about the intervention. As expected, we found that 63% of respondents in intervention communities reported knowing someone trained in mediation compared to only 11% in the comparison communities. Moreover, in intervention communities, 32% of respondents reported going to someone

[10] All reporting of the results is collapsed across gender, livelihood, and age groups. We tested to see if the intervention affected various groups differently and we did not find any consistent statistically significant differences across any of these groups. We did find a small number of statistically significant differences across age groups, which we report in footnotes throughout the discussion below.

trained in mediation for a dispute, while only 6% cited the same in the comparison group. This demonstrates at the very least that the training was salient and known across the intervention communities.

Violence and Perceptions of Insecurity

First, we explored differences in experiences with violence and perceptions of insecurity across intervention and comparison communities. As shown in Figure 4, 30% of respondents in communities with IBMN-trained local leaders reported experiencing a violent conflict in the past six months. In contrast, respondents in comparison communities reported far more incidents, with half citing violent conflict. This reduction in reported violent events is significant at the 0.001 level.[11]

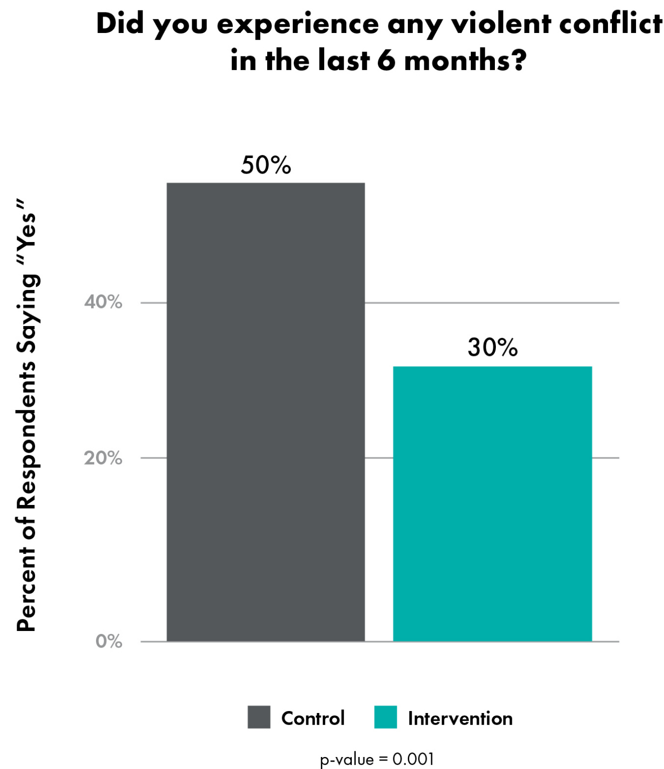

Figure 4. Community-Reported Violent Conflict, By Intervention Group

Similarly, respondents in intervention communities reported feeling more safe walking around their communities (Figure 5). Nearly 53% of respondents in comparison communities reported feeling unsafe "Often" or "Always," compared to only 32% of the respondents in intervention communities (*p-value = 0.002*).[12] Citizens also felt more secure in communities where the conflicting group primarily lives (Figure 6). This difference is also statistically significant *(p-value = 0.001)*.

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[11] For this outcome, there are some statistically significant differences across three age groups: youth (18-35), adults (36-50), and elders (above 50). Fewer adults report violent events than youth *(p-value=.0.07)* and elders *(p-value<0.001)*. In addition, fewer youth report violent events than elders *(p-value=0.02)*. We did not find any statistically significant differences across gender or livelihood.

[12] Fewer adults report feeling unsafe, relative to elders (statistically significant, *p-value=0.02)*.

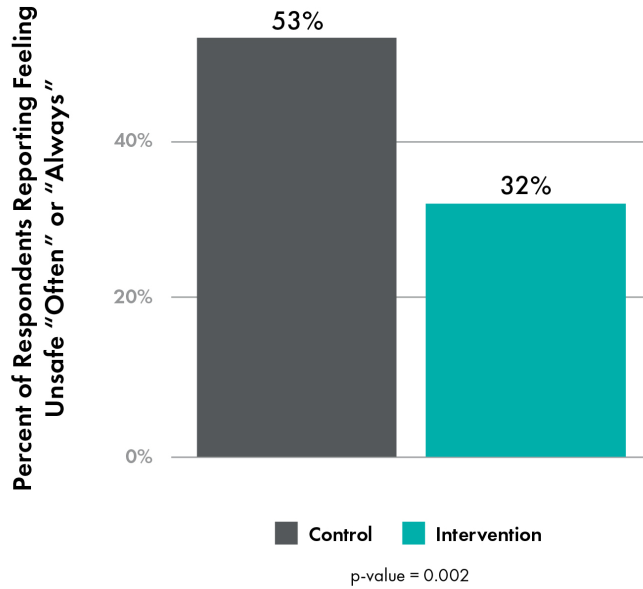

Figure 5. Perceptions of Insecurity, By Intervention Group

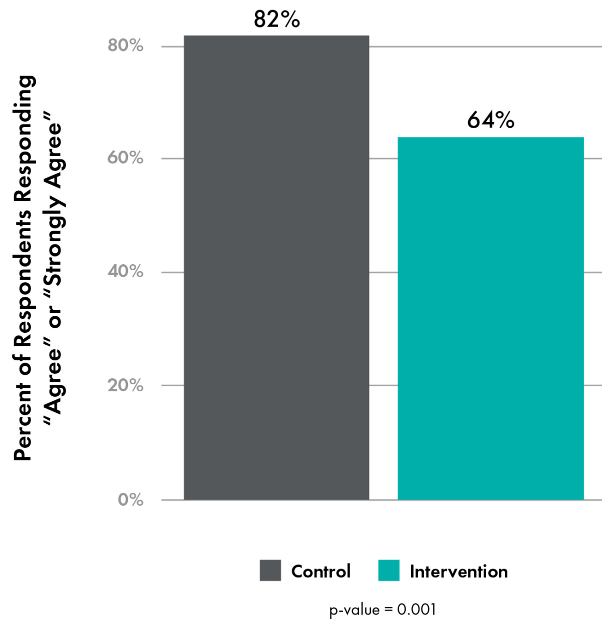

Figure 6. Perceptions of Insecurity vis-à-vis Out-Groups, By Intervention Group

Cooperation and Social Cohesion

With respect to social cohesion and cooperation, we found somewhat mixed results. On our measures of trust, we found small substantive, but not statistically significant, differences across communities with trained leaders and communities without trained leaders (Figure 7). We asked respondents how much they trusted members of the community with whom they conflict the most. In communities with trained leaders, the average level of trust is approximately 1.95, while in communities without trained leaders the average level is only slightly lower at 1.7 (*p-value = 0.1*).[13]

Additionally, we asked respondents how much time they would hypothetically take away from their daily tasks to help either a member of the conflicting group or a member from their own group bring their goods to the market. We found only a small increase in the willingness to help a member from a conflicting group among citizens with trained leaders, compared to those with leaders who had not received training (1.7 hours versus 1.5 hours). This difference also does not pass conventional levels of statistical significance (*p-value = 0.1).*

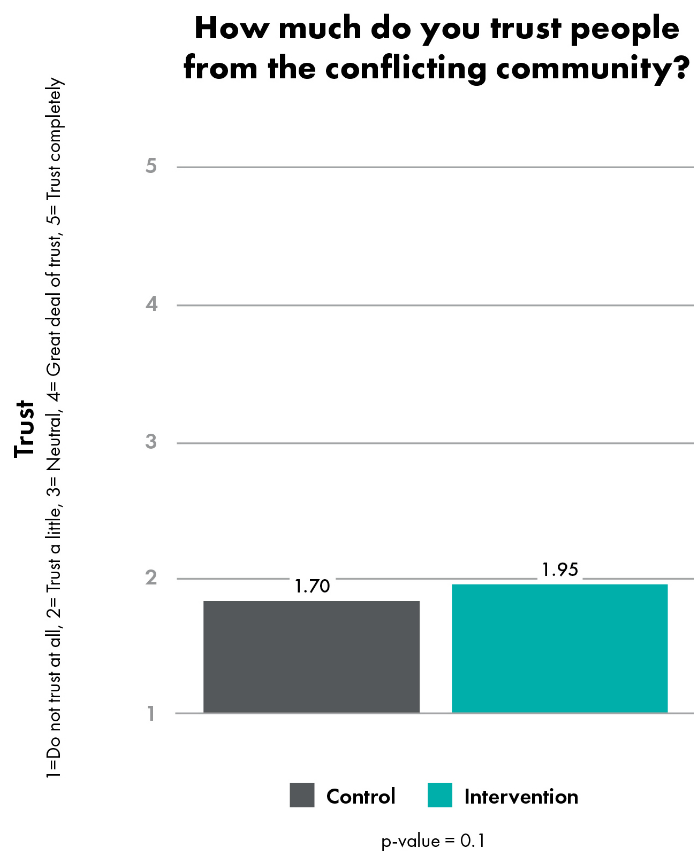

Figure 7. Trust in Out-Groups, By Intervention Group

Nevertheless, while we did not find attitudinal changes in trust or willingness to help members of the conflicting group, we did find an increase in social and economic interactions among citizens with trained leaders. We found that citizens with trained leaders are more likely to engage in economic transactions with

[13] Adults have larger increases in trust, relative to youth (statistically significant, *p-value=0.01)*.

members of the conflicting group compared to citizens without trained leaders (*p-value = 0.04*). Similarly, they are more likely to cite that they have interacted with an out-group member in the last month (*p-value = 0.09*). In addition, among those respondents who report interacting with a member of the conflicting group in the last month, those with trained leaders were more likely to report that they interacted socially outside the home. This result was also statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Respondents in communities with trained leaders were more likely to report *"Very positive"* or *"Somewhat positive"* interactions with the conflicting community outside the market. These differences were statistically significant (*p-value = 0.01*).

Satisfaction with Dispute Resolution Process

Lastly, we were interested in whether the training affected how people perceived the dispute resolution process (Figure 8). We asked respondents whether disputes in their community (including conflicts between ethnic groups) are normally resolved satisfactorily so that all sides are satisfied. We found positive effects in support of the IBMN trainings. An overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) in the intervention communities reported that disputes are resolved satisfactorily *"Often"* or *"Always."* In contrast, in comparison communities, only 69% of respondents stated that disputes are resolved satisfactorily. These differences were also highly statistically significant (*p-value = 0.001*). We might expect these results among respondents who reported going to trained leaders to address a dispute. Yet, *these results hold across all community members*, both those reporting that they have gone to a mediator and those who have not.

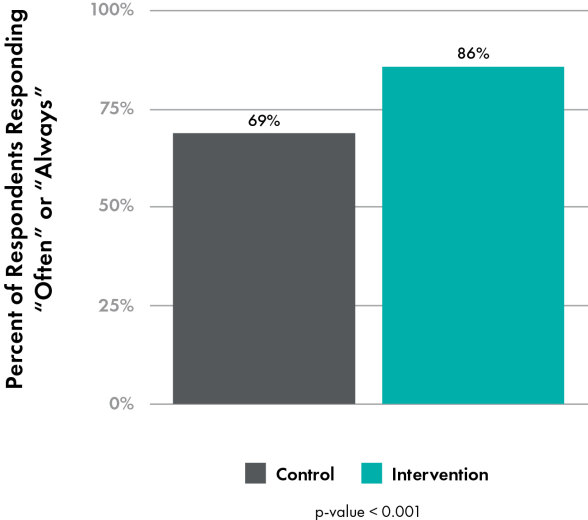

Figure 8. Satisfaction with Dispute Resolution Processes, By Intervention Group

Limitations and Alternative Explanations

Biases in Survey Responses

One limitation of the study is its reliance on survey measures. These measures may be susceptible to "demand effects" in which respondents tell enumerators what they believe they want to hear. For example, those in intervention communities may be more likely to report higher levels of security since they know the

intervention was supposed to increase security. Alternatively, those in comparison communities may report higher levels of violence since they hope that by expressing this need, they may receive the intervention. While these are reasonable concerns, we feel they are mitigated by the pattern of results. If intervention communities were telling enumerators only what they wanted to hear—that the program worked—we would have seen positive results across the board, yet we did not find as much change on trust as on other measures. Similarly, we would not expect to see reported rates of violence be lower at endline than at baseline if the comparison communities were trying to signal that they needed the intervention. Community members would have also had to coordinate their responses, which seems highly unlikely as they were randomly and individually sampled.

Additionally, recent research has demonstrated that demand effects in survey research are less of a concern than initially believed (Mummolo & Peterson, 2019). While previous work in Sierra Leone has shown that community members were more likely to cooperate in a behavioral game when a Westerner was present (Cilliers, Dube, & Siddiqi, 2015), recent research in Tanzania has shown that community members did not inflate their answers regarding humanitarian need despite knowing that Westerners were involved in the research (Baldwin, Manda, & McGuire, 2020). However, in that same research, village leaders were more likely to exaggerate levels of need, so we are a bit more tempered in our interpretation of the leader results in this study.

Undersampling of Herders

Our sample is predominantly farmers. This is due to a number of factors. One is the fact that as a nomadic population, herders are more difficult to reach. A second is the demographics of Benue state have shifted considerably following the passage of the anti-grazing law in 2017 and the subsequent uptick in violence. Many herders were displaced to Nasarawa state, an area that is not part of the CIPP program. As a result, we have more farmers than herders in our sample. This undersampling limits our interpretation of the data. Particularly in Benue state, it looks as though farmers are more affected by violence than herders. This is in part due to incidences of violence between farmers. Additionally, herders are crossing into Benue for reprisal attacks, yet because they are not living in Benue, their views are not part of the sample. As a result, we want to be cautious in our interpretation of the differences across groups, as it is likely that the difference in exposure to violence among farmers and herders is more due to sampling rather than experience of violence.

This sampling difference mostly affects our understanding of the descriptive data reported at the beginning of the results section, but has limited impact on our interpretation of the experimental results. And while we see absolute differences across groups—such as the amount of violence reported—they report similar conflict issues (i.e., both report the same main three conflicts across the three states). We also examined if the intervention affects the farmers and herders differently, and we did not see any group differences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We found that the mediation component of the CIPP program significantly lowered the levels of reported violence and perceptions of security among both leaders and community members. We also found that both leaders and community members in intervention communities reported improvements in dispute resolution capacities. However, while leaders who were trained in mediation and communities with trained leaders interacted more with conflicting groups socially and economically, we did not see changes in overall levels of trust between groups.

These results reveal how mediation interventions can affect peace outcomes. Many peacebuilding interventions include multiple components, with little discussion or investigation of how these different components relate to various outcomes. What we see here is that for the wider community, helping leaders become more effective mediators contributed to a decrease in reported violence and an improvement in perceived security. Indeed, the primary—and highest-order—outcome of a mediation intervention is that leaders will help resolve escalating tensions before they lead to violence. Therefore, this intervention achieved its primary aim of managing conflict.

In conflict-affected areas, quelling violence and improving security is necessary so that people feel safe to engage in activities such as sending their children to school, going to the market or to their fields, as well as other aspects of community life. Without this basic level of security, these activities become risky. And as we see in comparison communities, that risk makes people more likely to avoid these types of activities and the social and economic interactions they entail.

While we found that people in intervention communities engaged in more social and economic activities with members of the conflicting group than those in comparison communities, we do not see the same improvement in trust. We speculate that the improved perceptions of security in intervention communities created opportunities for greater interactions across groups. However, greater security did not create opportunities for deeper engagement between people to help resolve some of the underlying issues at the core of the conflict. A number of recent studies on social contact theory have shown that while intercommunal contact may improve behaviors between groups, attitudes appear to be harder to change (Mousa, 2020; Scacco & Warren, 2018). For changing attitudes and social cohesion, addressing the past may also be needed (Cilliers, Dube & Siddiqi, 2016).

Finding ways to address both security and trust through peacebuilding interventions would help address questions of sustainability. Previous Mercy Corps research has found that a combination of mistrust and insecurity drive much of the violence in northern Nigeria (Lichtenheld & Ogbudu, 2021). Increased trust between groups and improved security may support a virtuous cycle, in which the lack of violence allows interactions between communities to take place, helping to build trust. Trust, in turn, helps defuse disputes more quickly so they do not erupt into violence.

The findings from this study, coupled with the results from the previous ECPN study—in which we found that social contact interventions help communities maintain contact and trust in insecure environments—indicate that combining mediation training of leaders with contact-based interventions could be used to start a virtuous cycle and promote the sustainability of peacebuilding programs. This study also shows the value of working directly with local leaders to resolve conflicts in areas where the state is weak or has less of a presence. Our findings indicate that working with local leaders to improve their dispute resolution skills not only helps these leaders and the disputants they assist, but the larger community as well. Additionally, it appears that the impact of the mediation training on perceptions of security was relatively swift, as these outcomes were realized less than a year after the intervention. That the training of a limited number of local leaders showed effects so quickly and at scale underscores the cost effectiveness of such interventions.

Based on these results, we recommend the following:

Invest in improving the mediation capabilities of local leaders: Preventing and stopping violence is a top priority for many peacebuilding programs. Our results indicate that local leaders, with the right tools, can be effective at reducing violence and improving security – and these results can be realized relatively quickly. We also show that mediation interventions not only yield benefits for trained leaders and the disputants they help, but for the broader community as well. This illustrates the potential scale of these types of interventions, where reaching a few people cascades to many. Moreover, these interventions are relatively cost-effective. In this context, training and mentoring 340 leaders over the course of a year cost approximately USD 60,000. Alternative methods for securing communities, such as expanding policing or other forms of security, are much more expensive. Based on this promising evidence and low cost, donors should increase their investments in enhancing the skills of local leaders to resolve conflicts, particularly in areas where state presence is weak.

Pair peacebuilding interventions that halt violence with interventions that build trust between groups: Violent conflict has multiple drivers. The underlying causes of conflict are based on structural, social, and institutional inequities, as well as the social and psychological factors that foment mistrust and make conflict difficult to resolve. Proximate causes—such as land encroachments or elections—often trigger violence. In the results presented here, we see that mediation interventions were effective at addressing proximate causes of conflict, but did less in changing underlying causes, such as a lack of cohesion between groups. Stopping violence is extremely valuable in its own right, but it also provides opportunities for other interventions that address underlying causes of conflict to be implemented. Moreover, if violence is not quelled while trying to implement interventions aimed at social cohesion or other structural factors, there is a risk of losing gains in these other areas. For example, an eruption of violence may increase mistrust or prevent service delivery to certain communities. Therefore, we recommend that donors and implementers combine interventions that stop violence, like mediation training, with ones that address the underlying causes of conflict in areas with active violence.

Consider phasing in various peacebuilding interventions. Rather than conducting all activities at once, particularly in contexts with active conflict, prioritizing mediation and other methods for directly reducing violence first may provide the most immediate benefit to communities. With more security, community members may then feel safer to engage in other peacebuilding activities that require deeper contact with other groups and be able to focus on addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. Also, with more stability, such activities are less likely to be derailed due to upticks in violence. For donors, this may require considering how these types of interventions have different "spend rates" and plan accordingly. This would help reduce the pressure on implementers to start all activities at once. Moreover, implementers may want to consider designing workplans that sequence activities so that those focused on stopping violence are implemented first. While there is often a feedback loop linking violence and social cohesion, stopping violence first may be more likely to create a "quick win," while cohesion activities may take longer to produce tangible results.

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