



Community-Driven Reconstruction in Colombia: An Experimental Study of Collective Action beyond Program Beneficiaries



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ABSTRACT

Increased community cooperation is an important objective of Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) programs in post-conflict settings. While these programs typically work with a limited group of beneficiaries, little is known about the potential community impact beyond these beneficiaries. To investigate this, we empirically analyze how cooperative behavior develops in a lab-in-the-field experiment with mixed groups of CDR program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, organized in 42 municipalities in Colombia with active CDR programs. In the experiment, we use two rounds of a binary public goods game with a communication stage between both rounds. The experimental data are complemented with information on pre-existing social proximity among the participants and whether they have participated in a CDR program. We find that cooperation increases after communication, and that it correlates positively with the proportion of cooperators before communication. This peer effect is mainly driven by the cooperative behavior of CDR program beneficiaries while the influence of non-beneficiaries is limited.

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1. Introduction

Local collective action is necessary for economic growth (Justino, 2006), market participation (IFPRI, 2014), and local governance (Ostrom, Gardner, & Walker, 1994) in post conflict states (Del Castillo, 2008; Özerdem, 2012). Conflict impedes economic growth and compromises the effectiveness of broad social institutions (Blattman & Miguel, 2010). Some researchers also suggest that conflict damages cooperation and social cohesion (Cliffe, Guggenheim, & Kostner, 2003). A recent meta-analysis by Bauer *et al.* (2016), however, reports that those exposed to violence are predisposed to show more cooperation toward in-group members and similar levels of cooperation toward out-group members than those with limited exposure to violent conflict after the conflict is over. Many questions remain, however, about how norms of cooperation diffuse through societies affected by violent conflict. Can international aid programs facilitate the transmission of such norms? Do such programs use extant social networks to facilitate this transmission?

Researchers and practitioners have tried to identify the most effective instruments to rebuild the damaged social fabric after the end of a conflict (Fearon, Humphreys, & Weinstein, 2009). To this end, the World Bank and other donors have begun extensive

use of Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) programs in post-conflict states (see Kyamusugulwa, 2013). CDR programs give local community councils authority over how to distribute development funds. The premise behind these programs is that locally accountable decision-makers can target local projects to meet time- and place-specific needs and that the process of aid administration and local project management can reinvigorate social norms of cooperation (Cliffe *et al.*, 2003). But despite the promises of CDR aid, empirical evidence of the effectiveness of CDR programs to increase social cohesion *beyond the original beneficiaries* is weak (Kyamusugulwa, 2013; Vervisch, Titeca, Vlassenroot, & Braekman, 2013). The relevance of this is obvious: if collective action is limited to the original group of beneficiaries then the welfare gains would be smaller for their communities.¹

In this article, we will shed light on the effectiveness of CDR programs to increase social cohesion beyond the original beneficiaries by examining how cooperation changes after communication. We do not focus on whether the intervention itself increases cooperation levels, which has already been studied before experimentally, with mixed results on effectiveness (Advenko & Gilligan,

¹ This relates to a wider debate, in which it is argued that development programs may reproduce and even reinforce divisions within communities (e.g., D'Exelle, 2009; Bastiaansen, De Herdt, D'Exelle, 2005).

2015; Fearon, Humphreys, & Weinstein, 2015; Fearon et al., 2009; Humphreys, de la Sierra, & van der Windt, 2013; King & Samii, 2014). Instead, we examine spill-over effects toward the wider communities in which CDR programs operate. To address this research question, we investigate communication effects on cooperative behavior between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of CDR programs. In particular, we study how communication influences cooperative behavior, by transferring information about people's past and future cooperative behavior.

There is strong evidence that non-binding communication influences cooperation in lab experiments used to study collective action behavior (e.g., Cardenas, Stranlund, & Willis, 2000; Dawes, McTavish, & Shaklee, 1977; Isaac & Walker, 1988; Ostrom et al., 1994 and see also the meta-analyses of Sally (1995) and Balliet (2010)).² Among other things, communication may facilitate the transfer of information about the propensity of others to cooperate in the group and then change the beliefs about others' future cooperation (Bornstein, 1992; Lopez & Villamayor-Tomas, 2017). There is extensive evidence that such beliefs influence individual cooperation decisions: People contribute more to collective action if they expect others to do the same, but they stop contributing when they observe that others free ride on their efforts. Such "conditional cooperation" tends to be an important driver of collective action (Fischbacher, Gächter, & Fehr, 2001).

Most of the existing literature on communication and collective action identifies the effect of within-group communication as a single average treatment effect for groups that are exposed to communication against those that are not. However, the effects of communication may vary considerably within groups, depending on factors such as the strength of social norms and the emergence of group identity, among others (Bornstein, 1992; Cardenas, 2003; Ghate, Ghate, & Ostrom, 2013; Lopez & Villamayor-Tomas, 2017; Shankar & Pavitt, 2002).

In particular for this study, we focus on how the effect of communication interacts with the identity of the people one communicates with, along two dimensions: their participation in CDR programs; and their social proximity in terms of pre-existing social ties and whether they are of the same gender. We include social proximity in the analysis as it allows us to identify important interactions with the influence of participation in CDR programs. With CDR programs aiming to increase social cohesion, this could provide policy-relevant insights. In addition, if social proximity correlates with participation in CDR programs, it may act as a confounding factor, which should be controlled for in the analysis.

To study how communication influences collective action and how this interacts with participation in a CDR program and social proximity, we use data from a lab-in-the-field experiment with a pool of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of CDR programs from villages and small towns of Colombia.³ More specifically, we use two rounds of a binary public goods game with a communication stage between both rounds. After finishing the first decision, participants do not get any public feedback regarding the contributions of others during that round nor do they get information about their earnings in that round. Subjects may use communication to share information about their decisions in the previous round, make commitments about what to do in the second round, or communicate about any other topic. The experiment was organized in 42 municipi-

palities, in six different regions with active CDR programs. The experimental data are complemented with information on the pre-existing social ties between the participants in our study, their gender and whether they had participated in a CDR program. Using econometric techniques we study how communication effects depend on the beneficiary status of the decision-makers and how they interact with the beneficiary status and social proximity of the peers (as measured by pre-existing social ties or whether they are of the same gender).

We summarize our results as follows: We find that the likelihood of cooperation after communication increases with the proportion of participants that cooperated before communication, and that beneficiaries of CDR programs exert a stronger influence on the collective action behavior of other community members than those that were not beneficiaries. We also find that this difference in communication effects is stronger among people who are socially more distant from each other, either because they do not know each other or they are of different gender.

2. Research design

(a) Background

The armed conflict in Colombia has been ongoing for more than five decades. This conflict involves government forces, rebel insurgencies, and illegal paramilitaries (Vargas, 2012). The majority of the victims of this conflict are civilians, with more than 220,000 deaths and 25,000 missing people during 1958–2012 (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013). Additionally 7% of the population was displaced by 2005 (Ibáñez & Velez, 2008).

In 1995 the first CDR program, the *Peace and Development Program of Magdalena Medio* (PDPMM or Peace and Development), was launched aiming to construct peace through inclusive development.⁴ In 1997 and 2001 this program received funding from World Bank Learning and Innovations Loans and in 2002 the European Union joined this initiative with the program "Peace Laboratory." Late in 2004 the EU and the World Bank funded the expansion of these programs to other regions of Colombia.⁵ There are currently 19 programs of this kind around the country. In all programs, projects are formulated and developed at the local level with the assistance of local organizations that have been working in the regions for many years. In total, approximately 1400 projects have been developed, around three major topics: human rights, culture, and peace; governability, institutional strength and citizen participation; and sustainable economic development (Guarín, Navarro, & Pellerano, 2008).

In 2006, the Colombian government and the donor agencies funded an impact evaluation of the programs operating in six different regions. One of the goals of the evaluation was to assess if collective action had increased in the areas, and for this, economic experiments were designed. Among the six regions, 127 municipalities in nine departments were included. In total, these regions have approximately 4 millions of inhabitants, 260,000 of whom are direct beneficiaries of at least one of the CDR projects (Guarín et al., 2008). The data used in this paper were collected as part of this evaluation.⁶

² The use of laboratory experiments to study communication effects allows full control on the variables of interest. In the field it is impossible to observe behavior before and after communication, in otherwise identical situations. To causally investigate the effect of communication, the controlled environment of the laboratory is very helpful, and has been increasingly used by development economists (for a literature review see Cardenas & Carpenter, 2008) as well as other social scientists.

³ For an example of a study that used a similar approach of combining a real intervention with a lab-in-the-field study in Colombia see Attanasio, Polania-Reyes, and Pellerano (2015).

⁴ This program was created by the petroleum union USO, the petroleum company ECOPEPETROL, the dioceses of Barrancabermeja and a consortium of two NGOs in a region of Colombia devastated by the conflict and the poverty conditions.

⁵ Both the Peace and Development and the Peace Laboratory programs are very similar. However, a main difference is that the projects funded through the World Bank loans focus on displaced families whereas the European Union programs did not have that focus (Guarín, Navarro, & Pellerano, 2008).

⁶ We refer to Table 7 in the Appendix for more details about the six regions.

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