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

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

1. INTRODUCTION

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

Despite rhetorical and financial commitments, the proposition that CDD inputs can generate lasting and transferable change in attitudes and behavior is much debated. Social and institutional changes are typically described as slow moving. To address this debate, this paper synthesizes evidence from four CDD field experiments displaying important methodological and programmatic similarities and recently undertaken in countries affected by violent conflict: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Using an approach modeled on the idea of "best evidence synthesis" (Slavin, 1995), we assess prospects for externally driven [1] "fast-track" institution building, meaning the strengthening of local capacities for inclusive problem solving and collective action over the span of a few years. We find that although the CDD programs generally established successful community-level organizations, broadening the base of participation in local development and providing an opportunity for community members to meaningfully work together to achieve community goals, the CDD programs in Afghanistan, DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone largely failed to increase the capacity for collective action in a way that is durable and transferable beyond the CDD interventions.

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

2. CDD, CONFLICT, AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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