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Does community-driven development build social cohesion or infrastructure?

In community-driven development (CDD) programmes, community members are in charge of identifying, implementing and maintaining externally funded development projects. CDD programmes have been implemented in low- and middle-income countries to fund the building or rehabilitation of schools, water supply and sanitation systems, health facilities, roads, and other kinds of public infrastructure. They have also been used to finance private cash transfers to individual households.

CDD programmes have received substantial funding, notably from the World Bank. Over the last three decades, they have evolved from being a response to mitigate the social cost of economic structural adjustment to becoming an alternative delivery mechanism for social services that link directly with communities. In addition, since the 2000s, there has been more emphasis on using CDD programmes for building social cohesion, increasing decentralisation and improving governance.

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) carried out a synthesis study to assess how CDD programmes have evolved over the years and what their impact has been. The authors synthesised evidence from 25 impact evaluations, covering 23 programmes in 21 low- and middle-income countries. They also drew on process evaluations and qualitative research to examine the factors influencing success and failure.

Highlights

- CDD programmes have no impact on social cohesion or governance.
- Many community members may hear about CDD programmes but not many attend meetings.
- Few people speak at the meeting and fewer still participate in decision-making.
- Women are only half as likely as men to be aware of CDD programmes and even less likely to attend or speak at community meetings.
- CDD programmes have made a substantial contribution to improving the quantity of small-scale infrastructure.
- They have a weak effect on health outcomes and mostly insignificant effects on education and other welfare outcomes.
- There is impact on improved water supply leading to time savings.

Main findings

Impact

CDD programmes improve facilities for education, health, and water and sanitation (Figure 1). Investments in water-related infrastructure have reduced the time required for collecting water. These programmes slightly improve health- and water-related outcomes, but not education outcomes. Their lack of impact on higher-order outcomes can be explained by the focus on infrastructure. These programmes have not always provided complementary inputs that may be necessary to enable or encourage use of health and education facilities.

There is no impact on social cohesion or governance. This is a consistent finding across contexts.

Targeting

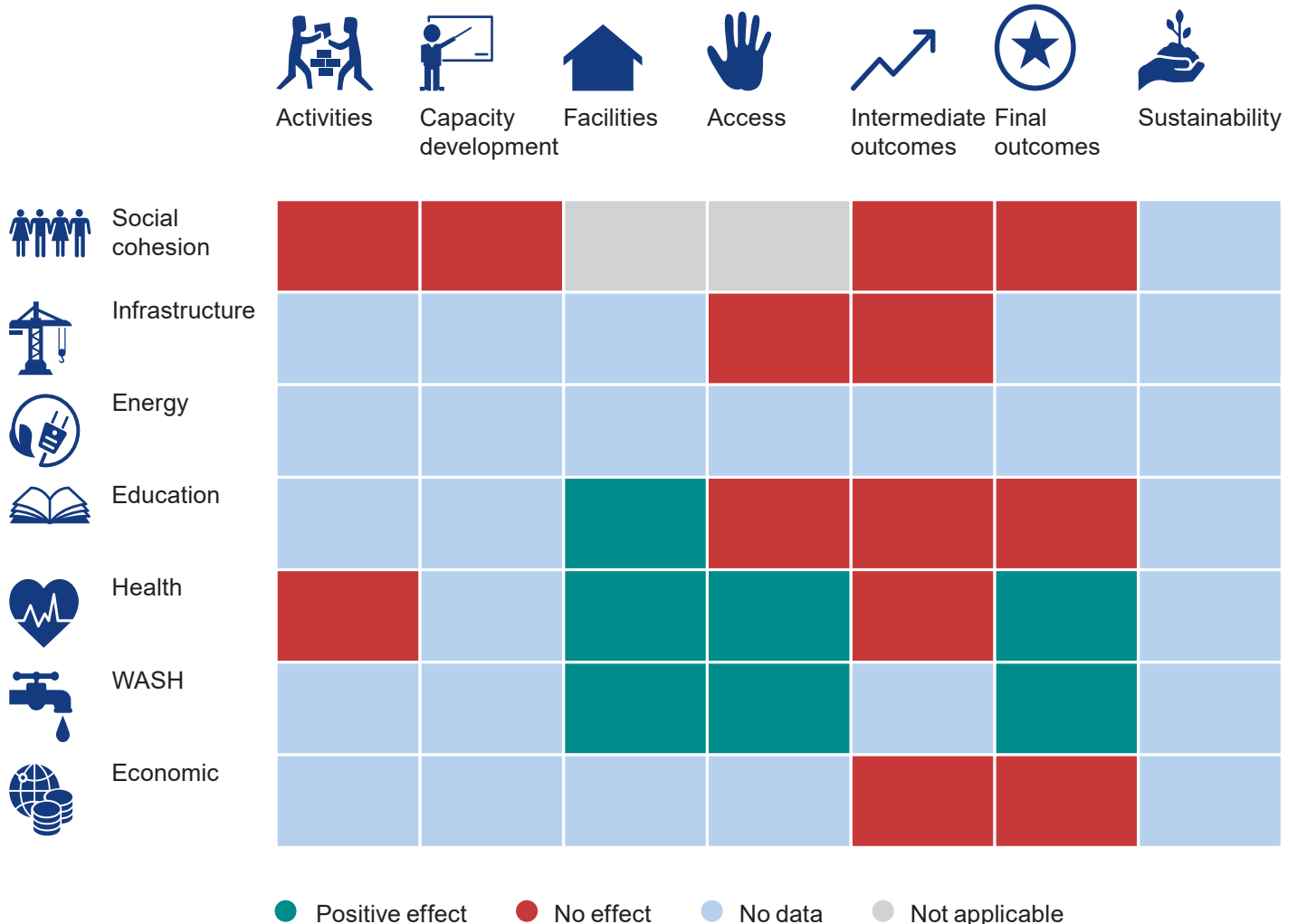
CDD programmes, especially social funds, involve explicit mechanisms, such as poverty maps, to reach poorer areas. This approach has been successful in achieving greater resource allocation to poorer areas, although not always to the poorest communities in those areas.

The funding structure of CDD programmes takes one of two forms – the application model or the allocation model. In the application model, communities apply for block grants, while in the allocation model, the implementer allocates grants to targeted communities. The community's elite or prime movers can play a more important role in the

application model than in the allocation model. They are more likely to know about the programme and have the skills for putting together a proposal. The type of community project selected and the community contribution requirement also affect who benefits from the programme.

Community-driven reconstruction programmes are generally successful in reaching conflict-affected areas. However, it can be contentious to target ex-combatants or conflict-affected persons for support rather than the community as a whole.

Figure 1: Overview of effects



Community participation

The entire community does not participate in all aspects of project management and implementation. There is a clear funnel of attrition (Figure 2). Many people may be aware of the programme and the community meeting, but few attend the meeting and fewer still speak or participate in decision-making. Women are only half as likely as men to be aware of CDD programmes, even less likely to attend the community meetings and even less likely still to speak at them. Evidence suggests people may have participated in making bricks, not decisions.

CDD programmes may be using existing social cohesion rather than building it. Numerous factors may affect community involvement, such as the role played by the elite or prime movers in the community, intra-community divisions and the perceived benefits of participation.

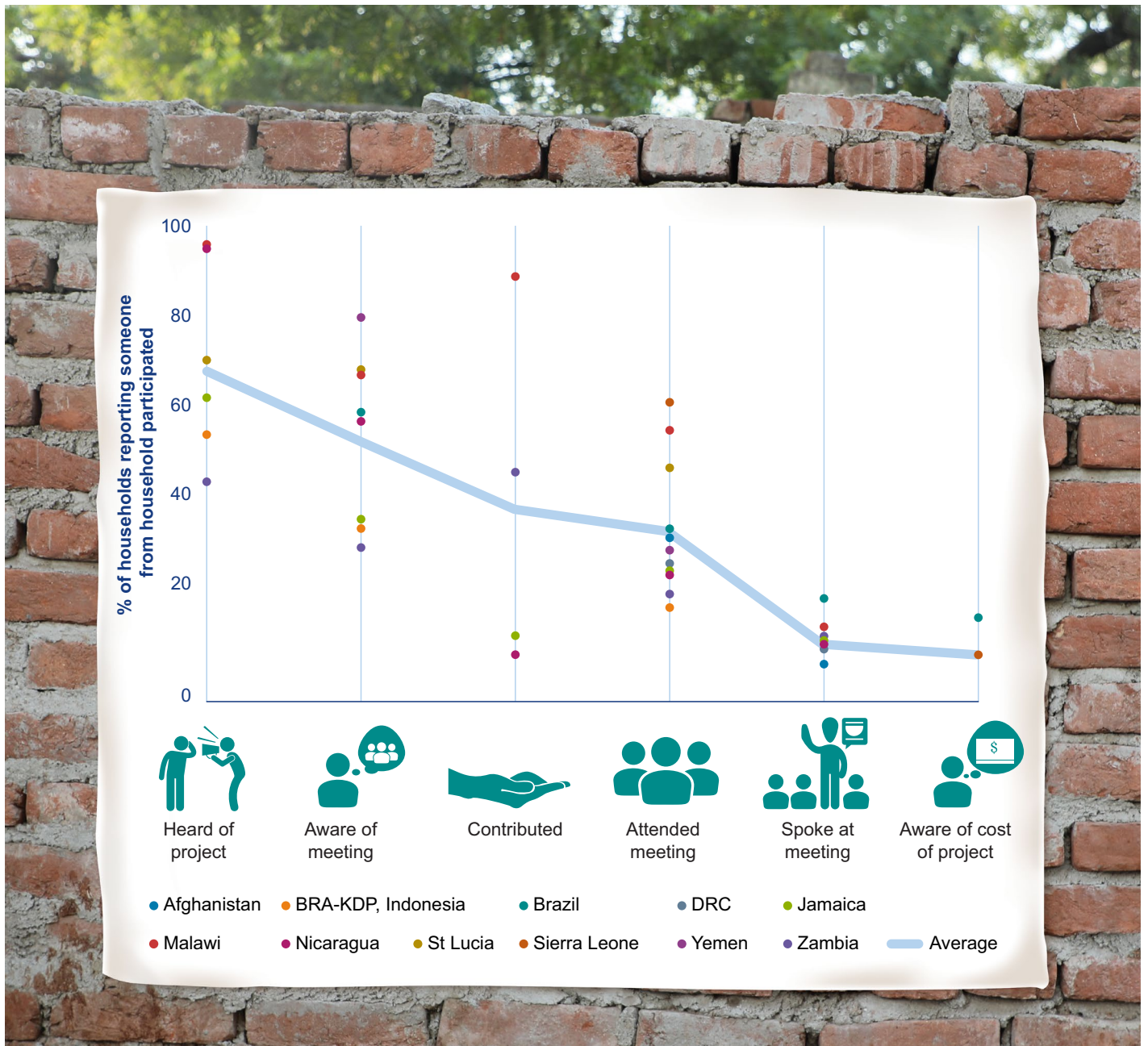
CDD's impact on governance is sometimes undermined by the creation of parallel structures for the purpose of the programme. These parallel structures may alienate community leaders. The function of these

governance structures is also often not clear once the community projects end.

CDD implementers can play an important role in facilitating participation. However, the nature, duration and intensity of external facilitation have varied greatly among programmes.

Evidence suggests people may have participated in making bricks, not decisions.

Figure 2: Proportion of households participating: the funnel of attrition





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Participation of marginalised people

Although CDD programmes have included measures to improve the participation of marginalised people, there is no evidence regarding the impact of such measures. There is also no information about how programme implementers facilitated the participation of different ethnic and religious groups living in a community.

Most programmes had rules or measures to encourage

women's participation in project identification and on project committees. However, gendered cultural norms and socioeconomic factors can negatively influence women's participation in the public sphere. Where female participation is a target, not a requirement, women's participation usually falls short.

Although CDD programmes have features that encourage women's participation in

meetings and village committees, less attention has been paid to their participation in project implementation, operations, maintenance and monitoring. Not many studies have carried out sex-disaggregated analysis of participation. Fewer still have assessed whether CDD programmes have empowered women to take a more active role in the public sphere, beyond the scope of the programme.

Implications for CDD policies and programmes

- The evidence from this synthesis and previous studies suggests that the CDD programme objective of building social cohesion should be abandoned because there is no evidence that CDD achieves it.
- Sustainable, cost-effective delivery of small-scale infrastructure does have significant positive impacts, even at scale and in different contexts.
- Programme implementers need to assess if community members are willing or able to make contributions to development projects. They should be aware that the contribution requirement may be a barrier to the participation of the poorest communities and poorest members within a community.
- For delivering more equitable programmes, it is important to move beyond the definition of a community as a geographical administrative unit and consider ethnic and religious groups and gendered power relations in the community.
- Implementers should pay explicit attention to the technical, institutional and financial mechanisms in place to ensure that these facilities are maintained and operate properly beyond initial phases.
- Designing CDD programmes involves a number of decisions, where various trade-offs need to be considered:
 - The institutional setup of the CDD agency, whether as an independent agency or as part of an existing government ministry or department, influences the impact of the programme;
 - There is a trade-off between the possible greater efficiency and flexibility of an independent agency and the greater government buy-in and sustainability of the processes implemented by an existing ministry; and
- The choice between using an application model or an allocation model should be informed by community capacity, financing and programme-targeting objectives. There is a trade-off between breadth and depth of coverage – reaching more communities or spending more in each.

Programme implementers need to assess if community members are willing or able to make contributions to development projects.



Implications for research

- Quantitative impact evaluations should assess the political economy of local decision-making and the different levels of existing social cohesion between subgroups in a community.
- Most impact evaluations have assessed both *bonding* social capital, such as trust and cooperation in the community, and *bridging* social capital, such as social connectedness with authority. Understanding the possible friction between these elements of social capital is an area for further research.
- The cost-effectiveness of CDD programmes is assumed but not proven. A cost comparison of CDD programmes and other delivery channels is one of the most important areas for future research. This would allow cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit analysis to be carried out and it would capture the practical significance of the impacts.
- Evaluations should also examine how issues related to the type of institution involved in implementation, the targeting of communities and the sustainability of arrangements influence programme impact. Future studies also need to examine how certain factors, such as grant size, continuity of funding, facilitation of community participation and longer-term provision of training, improve outcomes.
- Impact evaluations should give more explicit attention to the comparison condition and what the counterfactual is measuring. A comparison group analysis should consider the quality of CDD-supported facilities compared with those constructed through other channels. For determining if the programme led to the creation of new facilities, a before-versus-after comparison may be appropriate.
- We need more process evaluations and qualitative research for causal chain analysis – for assessing *why* and for *whom* programmes work or do not work at each stage of implementation.

About this brief

This brief is based on *Community-driven development: does it build social cohesion or infrastructure? A mixed-method evidence synthesis*, 3ie Working Paper 30 by Howard White, Radhika Menon and Hugh Waddington.

The study combined narrative synthesis and meta-analysis to examine the impact of CDD programmes along their causal chain. It examined whether CDD programme objectives and design had changed over the decades and how effective the programmes had been in improving outcomes. It also analysed the barriers to and facilitators of programme implementation.

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These papers cover a range of content. They may focus on current issues, debates and enduring challenges facing development policymakers, programme managers, practitioners and the impact evaluation and systematic review communities. Policy-relevant papers in this series synthesise or draw on relevant findings from mixed-method impact evaluations, systematic reviews funded by 3ie and other rigorous evidence to offer new analyses, findings, insights and recommendations. Papers

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