

## Dispute resolution: row summary

**Dispute resolution interventions have little or no effect on violence and can adversely affect violence-related norms, despite being associated with improvements in access to justice, physical security, and some measures of trust.**

Dispute resolution refers to interventions to handle disputes in community settings through approaches such as mediation, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, traditional councils, and other cultural means of resolving disputes. In the included studies, these approaches included interest-based negotiation training for community leaders and religious leaders, community mediation and dialogue forums, peace committees, interfaith initiatives, legal empowerment and paralegal support, linking customary dispute-resolution systems with formal courts, and community-driven projects such as shared grazing arrangements, gardens, and local infrastructure.

These interventions are intended to reduce conflict by improving the fairness, legitimacy, and effectiveness of local mechanisms for settling disputes before they escalate. Mediation skills training and facilitation aim to shift parties away from coercion toward negotiated solutions, while joint projects and structured dialogue are meant to create incentives for cooperation and rebuild relationships across groups. Legal empowerment and connections between customary and formal systems are intended to widen access to redress, strengthen confidence in justice providers, and reduce grievances that can fuel violence.

Dispute resolution has large positive effects on access to justice and public services ( $g = 0.48$ ; 2 studies, 9 effect sizes), which was driven by programmes that trained mediators, provided legal education, and expanded alternative dispute resolution and legal aid, although gender disparities and power imbalances often persisted. Large average effects were also reported for physical security ( $g = 0.29$ ; 2 studies, 7 effect sizes) in Nigeria, where CONCUR, IPNN, and ECPN combined negotiation training, mediation, and collaborative peacebuilding activities and were associated with improved freedom of movement and perceived safety. In Niger, the PEACE programme showed a large effect on cooperation intensity and willingness to help among direct participants ( $g = 0.28$ ; 1 study, 5 effect sizes), but showed little overall change in civic participation ( $g = -0.04$ ; 1 study, 9 effect sizes) and mixed results by subgroup, with women and youth often constrained by social norms and household responsibilities. There was also a positive effect on diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution ( $g = 0.21$ ; 4 studies, 35 effect sizes), with non-coercive strategies such as interest-based negotiation and alternative dispute resolution described as more effective than coercive approaches, which sometimes exacerbated conflict. Trust and acceptance of diversity outcomes showed a moderate average positive effect ( $g = 0.13$ ; 6 studies, 28 effect sizes), but effects varied across contexts, including some evidence that programmes strengthened within-group ties more than between-group trust in more homogeneous communities. In contrast, average effects were little or no for nature and scale of violence ( $g = 0.03$ ; 2 studies, 25 effect sizes) and government performance ( $g = 0.03$ ; 2 studies, 9 effect sizes). For example, a community empowerment programme reduced unresolved disputes in Liberia without reducing wider inter-tribal violence and was associated with increased youth-elder disputes, while UN peacekeeping patrols increased trust in police but were associated with higher perceived government corruption in patrol communities. Economic security showed a small average positive effect ( $g = 0.08$ ; 1 study, 11 effect sizes), reflecting improvements in some measures of economic

access in CONCUR sites but no measurable economic impact for IPNN. Violence-related social norms showed a moderate average adverse effect ( $g = -0.13$ ; 2 studies, 5 effect sizes): interventions reduced justification for violence in some measures but increased support for political violence in others, highlighting the potential for unintended consequences.

Confidence in these findings is generally low. Most outcomes draw on a small number of studies, several of which are context-specific programme evaluations with limited replication, and many measures rely on self-reported perceptions rather than verified behavioural outcomes. Where effect sizes are available, heterogeneity across settings and programme designs is substantial, with different components, target groups, and baseline conflict dynamics producing different results. Qualitative evidence from Southeast Asia and Indonesia highlights that mediation may be viewed as legitimate and useful where mediators are trusted and have authority to enforce agreements, but distrust of state institutions can undermine reforms linked to policing and formal services. Overall, the evidence suggests potential for improved dispute handling and perceptions of security and justice, but uncertainty remains about sustained impacts on violence and about the conditions under which adverse shifts in norms and participation occur.

#### Average effect sizes for dispute resolution outcomes

Outcome	Average effect size (g)	Number of studies	Number of effect sizes
Access, Justice, and Public Service	0.479	2	9
Physical Security	0.288	2	7
willingness to participate or help	0.280	1	5
Diplomatic relations & peaceful dispute resolution:	0.207	4	35
the Feeling of Trust & Acceptance of Diversity.	0.133	6	28
Economic Security	0.077	1	11
Nature & scale of violence or atrocity	0.030	2	25
Government Performance	0.030	2	9
civic participation	-0.041	1	9
Social norms regarding Violence or Atrocity	-0.132	2	5