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# UNBUNDLING PEACEBUILDING

## How Mediation and Community Dialogues Help to Prevent and Manage Violent Conflict in North Central Nigeria

APRIL 2024

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# Executive Summary

The effects of conflict last for generations, from the untold lives lost, protracted displacements, reduced economic activity subjecting people to poverty, limited security preventing travel to school or for healthcare, and the continued trauma of living under violence and uncertainty. Consequently, both governments and donors invest in numerous types of peacebuilding interventions, hoping something will stick. While there is a growing evidence base about the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions, this diverse set of activities are typically implemented as a bundle that attempts to address as many different types of conflict drivers and underlying causes as possible. However, this mode of implementation makes it difficult to know which parts of the bundle of peacebuilding interventions are having an impact on which outcomes. As a result, it is difficult for practitioners and policymakers to use this type of evidence to improve the effectiveness of their programs and make decisions about what types of programs should be scaled up in any given context.

To fill this evidence gap related to the disaggregated effects of bundled peacebuilding activities, we conducted a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) on a peacebuilding program that combined two different types of peacebuilding interventions: community dialogues and mediation training for local leaders. The program, Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP), funded by USAID, has worked across six states in North Central Nigeria since 2019. The study was conducted in Benue, Kogi and Plateau states, where farmers and herders have fought for decades over scarce resources, shaping deep-seated negative narratives across this social divide. Aside from community-level mediation training and community dialogues, CIPP also implemented a range of other activities at the LGA-level, including (but not limited to) designing and airing social media campaigns and radio programming that promote peace, youth-led action research, and supporting women's peace groups to help advance Gender, Peace, and Security aims.

## Methodology

The study presented here is the second in a two-study series. In the [first study](#), we randomly assigned 88 communities in Benue, Kogi and Plateau states to either serve as a comparison group or to receive a mediation training intervention, which involved training community leaders in Interest-Based Mediation and Negotiation (IBMN). For the second study, we randomly assigned half of the intervention communities and half of the comparison communities from the first study to receive the dialogue intervention, which brought conflicting groups together to discuss perceptions of the conflict and to build stronger ties between groups. From October to December 2022, we surveyed a random sample of 4,398 households across all four conditions. We asked community members about 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.

## Results

**The effects of IBMN training on violence and insecurity persist over 3 years.** In the earlier CIPP study, we found a strong effect of training leaders in mediation. In the present study, we find that the mediation intervention (consisting of the initial training three years earlier and ongoing mentoring and coaching) had strong positive effects on both violence and security. Forty-one percent of people in comparison communities report violent events compared to 19% in communities with the IBMN intervention and 10.4% in communities with both the IBMN and dialogue interventions. Additionally, individuals in communities with leaders trained in IBMN reported feeling more secure.

**We observe an increase in social cohesion in communities where leaders were trained in IBMN.** In the first study in this series, we observed mixed effects on social cohesion measures. In the second study, we continue to see more positive behaviors in communities with only the IBMN intervention and with both the IBMN and dialogue interventions. We also see a statistically significant difference in trust, with those who live in communities with leaders trained in IBMN reporting more trust in the out-group than those in comparison or dialogue communities.

**We find little impact of community dialogues on measured outcomes.** We see few changes between those who received the dialogues and those who did not on either security or social cohesion outcomes. We attribute the lack of an effect to the design and implementation, where the focus was to include many different people in one-off dialogue events.

## Recommendations

- **Continue to 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. Moreover, mediation also supports social and economic interaction between groups, and it appears that the combination of the reduction in violence and increased interactions over time contributed to people shifting their attitudes about the other group over time.

We also see that the results from the first study held for additional two years, with additional mentoring and coaching. That we see lower levels of violence in communities that received the IBMN intervention three years after the initial training illustrates the potential sustainability and cost-effectiveness of these interventions. In this context, training and mentoring 340 leaders over the course of three years cost approximately USD 60,000 for the initial training and an additional USD 25,000 for refreshers. Donors should continue and increase their investments in enhancing the skills of local leaders to resolve conflicts, particularly in areas where state presence is weak.

- **Consider more intensive dialogue interventions with influencers to promote greater attitudinal and behavioral change.** We attribute the inability of the dialogue intervention to affect the wider community to the “light dosage” of this intervention. In this programming context, dialogues were designed as one-off sessions with groups of participants selected from the community at large. Based on other research on the effectiveness of dialogues and similar interventions, we recommend that dialogues involve the same well-connected individuals over time to provide people with sufficient opportunity to learn about each other, understand each other’s perspectives, and begin to formulate a new group identity.
- **Incorporate evidence from behavioral science in programs to support broader societal change.** Peacebuilding programs often expect that change at the individual level will lead to change at societal level. In this theory of change, individuals who participate in such programs will influence their families and friends, and over time, prosocial attitudes and behaviors will spread widely enough to move societies. Yet without intentionality about how that spread occurs, that wider change tends to be limited. Behavioral science provides insights into how change moves from individuals to the collective. For example, research shows that social norms, which develop through public information, role models, and networks, are influential in changing people’s behavior at scale. Future programming and research should investigate how to cost-effectively combine community-level interventions with mass communication campaigns such as radio and social media to increase the likelihood that changes that occur among intervention participants lead to greater societal change.

# 1. Introduction

Violent conflict remains a significant cause of today's suffering. The effects of conflict last for generations, from the untold lives lost, protracted displacements, reduced economic activity, limited security preventing travel to school or for healthcare, and the continued trauma of living under violence and uncertainty. Consequently, both governments and donors invest in ways to end, reduce, and prevent violent conflict. Yet, despite these investments, violent conflict persists, with 2022 being the deadliest in 28 years (Obermeier & Rustad 2023).

While most conflicts do not turn violent, the ones that do are often extremely difficult to resolve, with the average length of today's internal armed conflicts lasting over 20 years (Blattman, 2021; US State Dept, 2022). This stickiness of conflict stems from an intersection of historical and current grievances, elite interests, and local processes, all of which reinforce each other. Consequently, many peacebuilding interventions bundle activities aimed at addressing these different causes simultaneously. For example, relationship-building interventions that aim to build social cohesion may be combined with security or mediation interventions that aim to manage conflict. However, since these activities are bundled together, it is difficult to know: 1) which program activities are having an impact in any given intervention; 2) whether program activities work similarly across different sets of peacebuilding outcomes; and 3) if the combination of program activities provides additional benefit compared to each program activity on its own.

To fill these evidence gaps related to the disaggregated effects of bundled peacebuilding activities, we conducted a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) on a peacebuilding program that combined community dialogues with mediation training for local leaders. The program, Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP), funded by USAID, works across six states in North Central Nigeria. The study was conducted in Benue, Kogi and Plateau states, where farmers and herders have fought for decades over scarce resources, shaping deep-seated narratives about each other. We find that the mediation program (consisting of an initial training three years earlier and ongoing mentoring and coaching) had strong positive effects on both security and social cohesion outcomes. Communities with trained leaders continue to report less violence and insecurity compared to communities without trained leaders. We also find evidence that some measures of social cohesion continued to increase over the past three years, particularly for attitudinal measures like trust. These findings suggest that training leaders in mediation training may help stabilize communities over time, therefore allowing for more interactions and increasing cohesion. In contrast, dialogues, which consisted of one-time meetings among different community members, had little discernible effect on either set of outcomes.

The report is organized as follows. In Section Two, we detail the theories and existing evidence motivating our hypotheses. In Section Three, we describe the context and the program. In Section Four, we provide a brief overview of the methods and analytical framework.<sup>1</sup> In Section Five we describe the results, and we conclude with a discussion of the key findings in Section Six and with policy and program recommendations in Section Seven.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Sections Three and Four draw heavily from (and in some cases directly quote) an earlier report by the same authors, as does the Managing Conflict section of Section Two. See Reardon, C., Wolfe, R., and Ogbudu, E. (2021) Can Mediation Reduce Violence? The Effects of Negotiation Training for Local Leaders in North Central Nigeria. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps.

## 2. Motivation and Hypotheses

Peacebuilding programs tend to fall into two buckets. There are programs that manage conflict that focus on what happens after tensions grow. These types of programs try to de-escalate tensions so that they do not escalate into violence or work to reduce violence once it has erupted. A second set of programs look to prevent conflict in the first place, based on an underlying theory that if people are able to live together and are able to communicate with one another, then people will be more able to address the underlying factors that give rise to conflict. While this delineation suggests that there are clear phases of conflict, in reality, there usually is an ongoing cycle between these different phases. As a result, different peacebuilding approaches are often bundled together into programs that attempt to address multiple types of conflict drivers and underlying causes simultaneously. That said, the theories behind these different peacebuilding approaches indicate that they emphasize different types of outcomes. Below, we describe the theories and evidence behind both these two approaches to peacebuilding.

### Managing Conflict

Theories of change related to managing conflict focus on ensuring that conflict either doesn't escalate or de-escalates, thereby reducing death and injury and increasing security so that people can have productive lives. Moreover, with lower incidents of violence and greater security, groups have more opportunities to interact, creating opportunities to strengthen social cohesion.

The effectiveness of interventions that manage conflict tend to be understudied, at least empirically. Interventions aimed at managing conflict typically focus on government institutions or formal leaders, and thus, 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 on the effectiveness of managing conflict is where actors take a security approach. For example, peacekeeping (Fortna, 2004; Howard, 2019; Blair, 2020) has largely been shown to be productive in ensuring conflict does not re-emerge; in contrast, the evidence on community policing is more mixed (Blair et al., 2021; JPAL/IPA, 2021).

The evidence is more limited on informal mechanisms for managing conflict. In fragile environments where state presence is weak, informal and traditional forms of governance are prevalent and under certain conditions are effective (Baldwin & Raffler 2019; Henn 2023; Mustasilta, 2019). For peacebuilding programs, in particular, a common intervention for managing conflict is working with local leaders to better mediate conflicts. However, since in most cases where these interventions are being implemented, local leaders are already mediating disputes. In such cases, it is unclear whether training to increase mediation capacity reduces violence more than what leaders have always done. One related exception is in Liberia, where people—not specifically leaders—learned mediation and nonviolent communication skills. The intervention reduced violence and shifted social norms related to dispute resolution in targeted communities despite people not reporting increased mediation skills (Blattman, Hartman and Blair 2014; Hartman, Blair and Blattman 2021).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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 (2014) for reviews. There is also a limited number of field studies on negotiation behavior focused on how it improves household dynamics (Ashraf et al., 2020) or negotiating natural resource management agreements (Christensen et al 2023) rather than mediation and peacebuilding.

As a result of these evidence gaps, Mercy Corps conducted an RCT on the mediation component of the CIPP program (Reardon et al 2021). In three of the CIPP states—Kogi, Benue, and Plateau—leaders of 88 farmer and pastoralist communities were randomly assigned to receive IBMN training. We found that training leaders in negotiation and mediation significantly improved their skills and credibility as mediators. Training leaders also resulted in community-wide effects: significant reduction in reported violence, increased freedom of movement, and improvements in perceived security. Respondents in the intervention communities also reported greater interaction with and generosity towards members of the other group. However, there was no statistically significant effect on the trust in or willingness to help the other group.

## Preventing Conflict

Theories of change related to preventing conflict often address the underlying causes of conflict. These largely fall into two main areas: lack of resources or lack of cohesion. From a realistic conflict theory perspective, conflict stems from competition over scarce resources (Sherif 1966). Programs that address competition over resources tend to look like development programs—building infrastructure or improving access to natural resources—with an eye towards being conflict sensitive. For example, a development program may focus on increasing access to resources groups historically have competed over, such as access to water or arable land. In these types of interventions, the core idea is that if people do not have to compete over resources, they won't fight.

Another underlying cause of conflict are prejudices, historical narratives, mutual recriminations, and an overall lack of social cohesion that makes cooperation between groups challenging. Consequently, conflict prevention programs that address these underlying causes focus on the relationship between groups. One common approach to building relationships is contact theory (Allport 1954). Whether through sports (Mousa 2020; Dittmann & Samii 2016; Lowe 2021), school or training (Scacco & Warren 2018), or dialogue (Paler et al 2020), when parties from different sides of the conflict come together, they may learn to understand each other more, hold less negative stereotypes and attitudes about the other, and be more likely to interact across group lines.

There is a growing evidence base for whether and how peacebuilding programs based on contact theory increase social cohesion (JPAL/IPA 2021). However, one area where the peacebuilding evidence is nascent is on the effectiveness of dialogue interventions (3ie; see Paler et al 2020 and Svensson & Broneus 2013 for exceptions). Dialogue interventions, which go beyond just contact, ask participants to discuss experiences and perceptions of the conflict as well as one another. Dialogues may shift attitudes and stereotypes for the following reasons:

- 1) Increases knowledge of one another, correcting misperceptions and building trust. Through conversation, participants learn about others' experiences of the conflict, how their interests may be more aligned than assumed, and their views may not be as polarized as believed. In Lebanon, participants in dialogues reported having more knowledge of the other groups compared to individuals in the control group (Paler et al 2020). In Ethiopia, participants in dialogues over eight months had more trusting attitudes (Svensson & Broneus 2013). However, in neither study did dialogues lead to more trusting behaviors. Moreover, in Ethiopia and in a study examining discussions related to a radio talk show in DRC (Paluck 2010), dialogues heightened awareness of discrimination and grievances.
- 2) Increases perspective-taking. Through the process of dialogue, participants are often asked to take the perspective of the other group. Perspective-taking has been associated with a number of pro-



social outcomes, including inclusionary behaviors towards refugees (Adida et al 2018; Alan et al 2021), reduction of stereotyping and ingroup bias (Galinsky & Moskowitz 2000), and reduction in gender-related prejudice (Brookman & Kalla 2016).

- 3) Recategorization of identity. Dialogues also have the opportunity for people to see overlapping identities and shift their self-concept to include the other group (Galinsky & Moskowitz 2000). These more inclusive identities are related to reduced bias and increased prosocial behavior (Dovidio et al 1997; Van Bavel & Packer 2021). For example, as a part of an interactive problem-solving workshop where Israeli and Palestinians engaged in dialogues about their views of the conflict, participants began to build cross-cutting coalitions of people who worked towards peace and view this commitment to peace as central to their identity (Kelman 1993).

## Hypotheses

Based on the above theories of change and existing evidence, we expect that mediation and dialogues will have effects on both violence and social cohesion outcomes. More specifically, with regard to mediation, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1a: Communities with leaders trained in mediation will experience less violence and more security than communities with no peacebuilding activities.**

**Hypothesis 1b: Communities with leaders trained in mediation will experience more social cohesion than communities with no peacebuilding activities.**

Mediation targets disputes that are already violent or are at elevated risk of becoming violent and therefore, should have a direct effect on violence and security outcomes. Moreover, if mediation is successful at leading to fewer incidents of violence, communities may have more opportunities to interact with each other and adjust their perceptions of the other group, therefore affecting social cohesion. Based on this rationale, the effects of mediation may be stronger on violence and security outcomes than social cohesion outcomes, which is what we found in the earlier evaluation of mediation training within CIPP.

Similarly, for dialogues, we hypothesize that they will affect social cohesion and violence outcomes:

**Hypothesis 2a: Communities that engage in dialogues will experience less violence and more security than communities with no peacebuilding activities.**

**Hypothesis 2b: Communities that engage in dialogues will experience more social cohesion than communities with no peacebuilding activities.**

The goal of dialogues is to prevent conflict by building shared understanding of each other's perspectives. Through contact and perspective taking, as well as viewing the other side as part of the group, dialogues will directly enhance trust and cohesion. Based on this stronger cohesion, fewer conflicts will emerge, and if they do, through conversation, can more easily be resolved, thereby affecting violence and security.

**Hypothesis 3: Mediation training coupled with dialogues will have an added effect on reducing violence and insecurity and increasing social cohesion, beyond the effect of IBMN and dialogues on their own.**

In addition to the independent effects of mediation and dialogues on violence, security, and social cohesion outcomes, there is good reason to expect that these interventions complement each other. Therefore, we predict that when paired, the effects will be stronger than either intervention alone. For example, as mediation reduces violence, community members will experience fewer negative incidents that feed prior beliefs about the other side (Nickerson 1998), creating a more conducive environment for constructive dialogue than if violence was still occurring regularly.

### 3. The Context in Northern Nigeria

We test these hypotheses in North Central Nigeria, where farmers and pastoralists have engaged in increasingly violent conflict over the last decade. Nigeria’s ethnically and religiously diverse northern region regularly experiences violence that splinters 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 intensified in recent years due to a combination of multiple factors including (but not limited to) 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; 4) population shifts, changing people’s minority vs. majority status; and 5) cycles of revenge attacks due to unresolved past grievances. Moreover, previous research by Mercy Corps indicates that 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. This widespread insecurity has also 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 killed 2600 people in 2021 (Africa News 2023).

### CIPP Program Description Overview

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), Social Justice and Human Development for Peace Initiative (JDPC) and Savannah Center for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD), implemented the USAID-funded Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) program. The CIPP program covers six states in Nigeria’s North Central and North West regions: Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kogi, Benue, and Plateau and ran from September 2019 through April 2024.

The goal of the CIPP program is to promote peaceful coexistence and stability in Nigeria. Through an integrated design that aims to mitigate and prevent 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 that promote peace.

Two of these interventions are commonly paired in many peacebuilding programs: mediation to manage conflict and dialogues to prevent conflict. We describe these interventions in more detail below.

## Mediation Intervention

To train leaders to become more effective mediators, Mercy Corps adopted the Interest-Based Mediation and Negotiation (IBMN) approach, which has been 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 four-day training in IBMN.

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.<sup>3</sup> To ensure that the leaders were representative of the community, women and youth leaders were also selected. Training was conducted between December 2019 and March 2020, covering a total of 340 local leaders across three states. From March 2020 to August 2022, leaders received two refreshers, as well as coaching and mentoring.

## Dialogue Intervention

In addition to the mediation intervention, the CIPP program included various forms of dialogue activities, where groups in conflict—farmers and herders, or different farming communities—would discuss perceptions of the conflict and work to build stronger ties between groups. Dialogue activities were facilitated by both Mercy Corps and the local partner, PARE. The dialogue activities ranged from community wide events, called Conflict Prevention Forums, that had upwards to a 100 people, to smaller women's groups, where there were about 25 participants. Other dialogue activities included trust events, women's peace councils and inter-faith groups.

Each community engaged in at least six dialogue activities from July 2021 to October 2022. In each community, two of the dialogue activities were Conflict Prevention Forums, one was a trust event, and the other three were a combination of women's groups and/or councils and inter-faith groups.

# 4. Study Design and Methodology

We evaluate the effects of the IBMN training and dialogues using a RCT. The RCT was conducted in three states across North Central Nigeria: Plateau, Benue, and Kogi (Figure 1). We conducted a baseline survey between September and October 2019. For the first study, focused on the mediation component, we

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<sup>3</sup> In two communities in Plateau state, we were not able to hold joint trainings between farmers and herders because tensions were so high between the groups. In these two communities, violence did get worse. While we are not able to say that it may have been even worse without the training, it does raise questions about where mediation training may be most fruitful. If community leaders are not able to train together because tensions are so high, the mediation training may have limited effects, and other interventions may be needed first.

conducted a follow up survey between March and May 2021. For this study (Study 2), we conducted a third survey between October and December 2022.<sup>4</sup>



**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 salient cleavage. 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.<sup>5</sup> Next, we randomly 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 assigned to a third “buffer” group, which did not receive any training activities during the period of

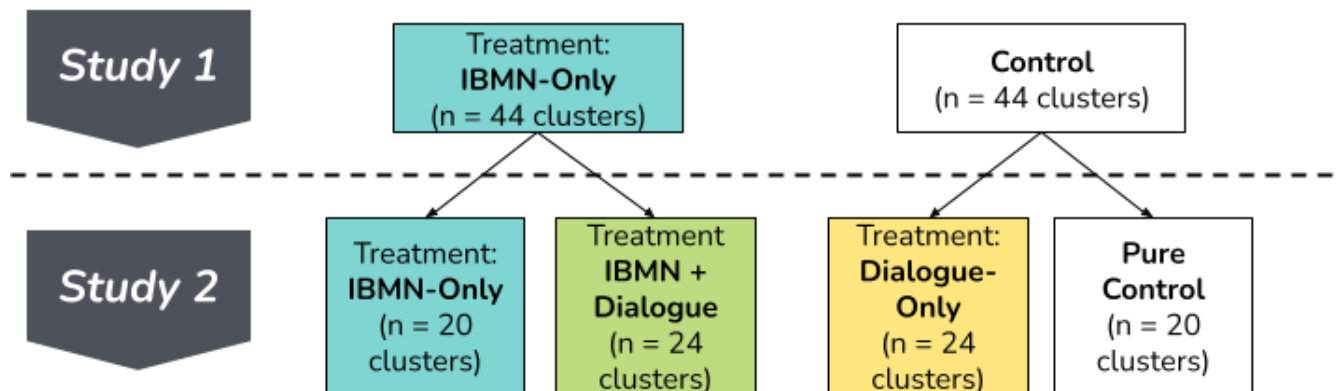
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<sup>4</sup> We also conducted a survey of leaders selected for the IBMN trainings as well as an additional sample of leaders that were part of a comparison group. We report these results in Study 1.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

the RCT, but which are geographically close to intervention communities and could have inadvertently been exposed to the program.

After a year of implementation, we randomly assigned half the intervention communities and half of the comparison communities to receive the dialogue intervention. This created a 2 x 2 design, where we crossed mediation training and dialogues. As a result, we were able to compare the combination of the two interventions with mediation training alone, dialogues alone and control (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Research Design for Study 1 and Study 2**

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 additional surveys for Study 1 and 2, we used similar methods to select households. For Study 2, we conducted a survey of 4,398 households from October to December 2022; 1599 of the respondents were from Benue, 1601 from Plateau and 1198 from Kogi.

## Analytical strategy

We used a difference-in-means estimation strategy to examine the effects of the training program, dialogues and the interaction of the two on our outcomes of interest.<sup>6</sup> The unit of analysis for this study is the community.<sup>7</sup> All analyses are conducted using robust standard errors clustered at the community level. Our

<sup>6</sup> For more detail on the analytic strategy, see Appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

main specification is the covariate adjusted model; for robustness checks, we include LGA and demographic controls.<sup>8</sup>

## Outcome measures

We focused on two sets of outcome measures to assess the impact of the IBMN trainings and dialogues: (1) violence and insecurity and (2) social cohesion. Under violence and insecurity, we report on the following:

- **Violent events:** people were asked if they witnessed a violent event in the past six months.
- **Farmer-Herder issues:** people were asked if there were any farmer-herder issues in the past six months.
- **Perceptions of insecurity:** people were asked how safe they felt doing various activities, whether they felt safe doing them at different times of day, and whether they felt safe traveling to another community.

We also measured social cohesion between groups.<sup>9</sup> We examine three aspects of social cohesion:

- **Behaviors:** *What I do or intend to do.* These measures included self-reported engagement with other groups and willingness to engage in social and economic interactions.
- **Attitudes and Affect:** *My feelings.* These measures included trust in the other group and how comfortable people felt about intermarriage, trading with the other group, sharing a meal etc.
- **Group Norms:** *My beliefs about what my community finds acceptable.* We asked about people's beliefs about whether their community likes the other group, thinks the other group is violent, and approves of intermarriage. We include norms as they often have more influence on behaviors than personal attitudes (Prentice and Paluck 2020).

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<sup>8</sup> Results for our primary specification and additional models are available in Appendix 2.

<sup>9</sup> We note that social cohesion can also refer to how people bond with their own group and how they feel about higher ups (e.g. government and institutions). However, given the focus of this program, we only measured social cohesion across groups.

# 5. Results

## Demographics

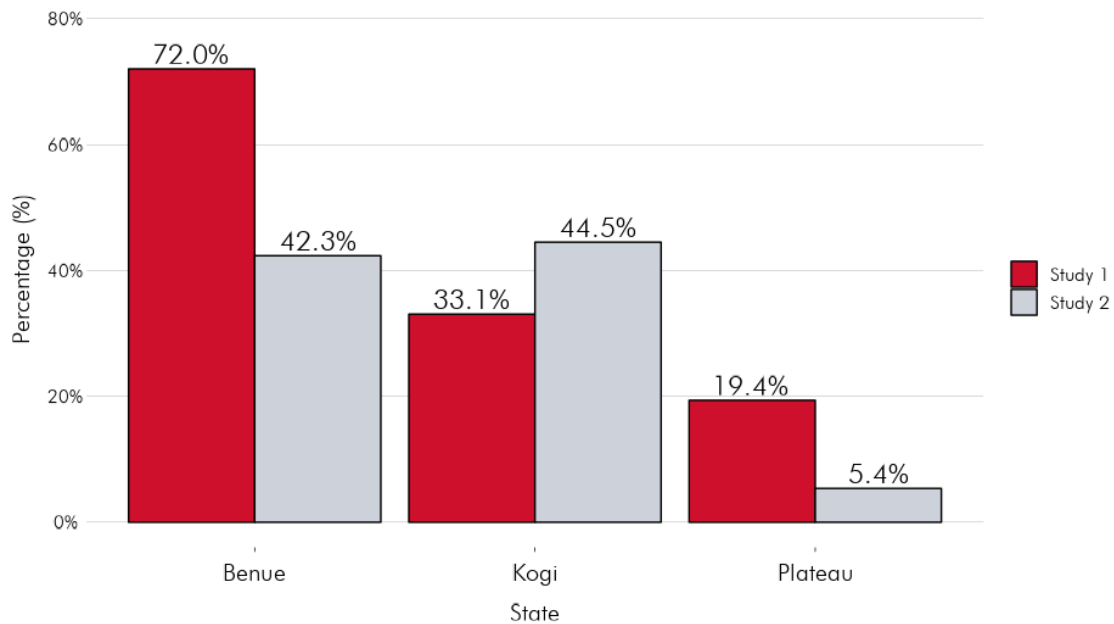
The general population endline survey sample was 4,398 respondents. The sample was 53% male and 47% female. Almost 50% of the sample was between the ages of 18 and 35, with 36% being between 36 and 50, and 16% being over 50. The overall sample was 35% Muslim and 65% Christian, however, this varies by state, with Benue remaining largely Christian after the displacement of many herders in 2017. The sample includes a wide range of ethnic groups, the largest three being 26% Tiv, 25% Fulani, and 11% Igala. Approximately 50% of respondents were farmers and 16% were herders; the remaining 34% were mostly business owners.

## General Conflict Situation

Overall, violence has declined since Study 1, with 29% reporting a violent conflict incident in the last six months, compared to 42% in Study 1. There was a marked difference across states in the number of respondents reporting a violent conflict incident in their community (See Figure 3). While residents in Benue reported similar rates of violence as residents in Kogi, we see dramatic decline, with 72% of residents reporting a violent event in Study 1 compared to 42.3 in Study 2. In contrast, Kogi experienced approximately an 11% increase in reported violent events (44.5% in Study 2 compared to 33.1% in Study 1). Respondents in Plateau reported lower levels of violence initially and also reported a dramatic decline (See Text Box).

### What Changed in Plateau State

*Overall violence decreased considerably in Plateau during the period that is the focus of this study. Due to heightened levels of violence in Plateau in 2018 and 2019, numerous donors and agencies concentrated their efforts there, including USAID, GiZ, and UNDP. Additionally, the Plateau Peace Building Agency, which was established in 2016, gained strength, engaging in numerous activities across the state. This focus from both State and international actors to reduce violence meant that a significant portion of the citizens in Plateau participated in peacebuilding activities. For example, in Plateau 32% of respondents in the comparison communities reported participating in some type of peacebuilding activity, compared to only 3.5% in Benue and 1.5% in Kogi. These results point to how coordinated efforts may help to bring down violence.*



**Figure 3. Frequency of Violent Events in Study 1 and Study 2**

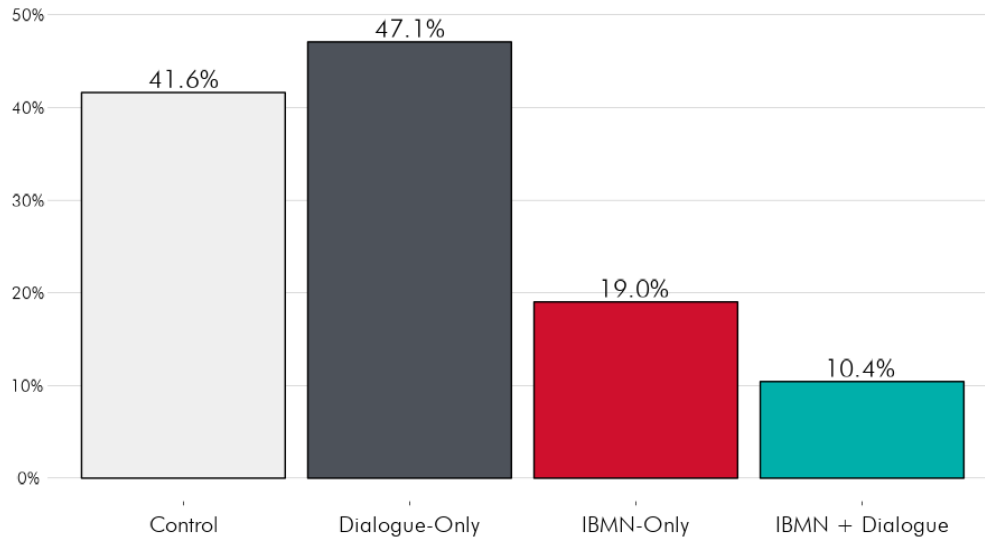
## Overview of Key Results and Findings

The main purpose of this study was to examine if and how mediation and dialogues lead to improved peacebuilding outcomes, both separately and together. Below we present the results across the four randomly assigned conditions: 1) IBMN Training, 2) Dialogues, 3) IBMN + Dialogues, and 4) Control. Overall, we find that IBMN and IBMN + Dialogues led to less violence and insecurity and more cohesion compared to Dialogues and Control. Unless noted otherwise in the text, these differences are statistically significant (See Appendix 2 for the full regression tables). Additionally, we do not detect an interaction effect between dialogues and IBMN, nor do we see statistically significant differences between the IBMN treatment and IBMN + Dialogues nor between Dialogue and Control. Therefore, we largely discuss the differences between communities who receive IBMN and those who do not.

### How does mediation training affect violence, security, and social cohesion (Hypothesis 1)?

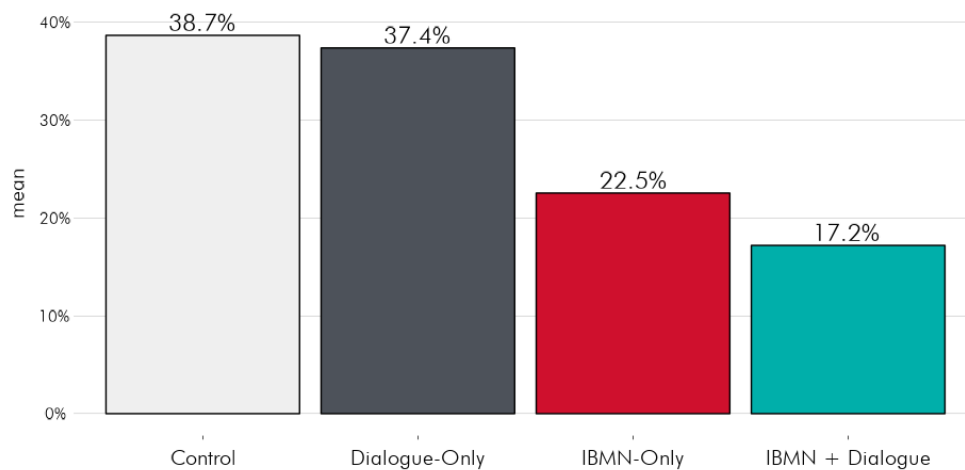
We find strong support for the first set of hypotheses. As with the first study, people who live in communities with trained leaders report less violence and more security. Specifically, fewer than 20% of respondents in IBMN communities report experiencing a violent conflict in the last six months; in comparison, over 40% in control and dialogue communities report experiencing a violent event (see Figure 4).





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

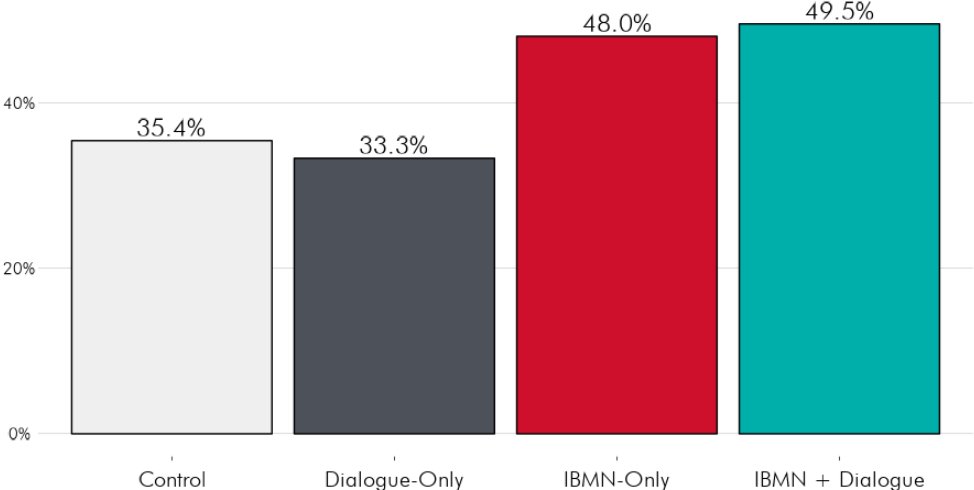
We also see that 20% fewer respondents in IBMN communities report farmer and herder issues than those in the comparison and dialogue. Moreover, those who live in communities with trained leaders report being less likely to avoid areas where other groups reside (See Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> We find a similar pattern of results for our other measures of insecurity, such as feeling safe traveling at different times of day.



**Figure 5. Avoidance of Areas where Out-Groups Live, By Intervention**

<sup>10</sup> Note that we only see statistically significant results for this outcome when we control for LGAs.

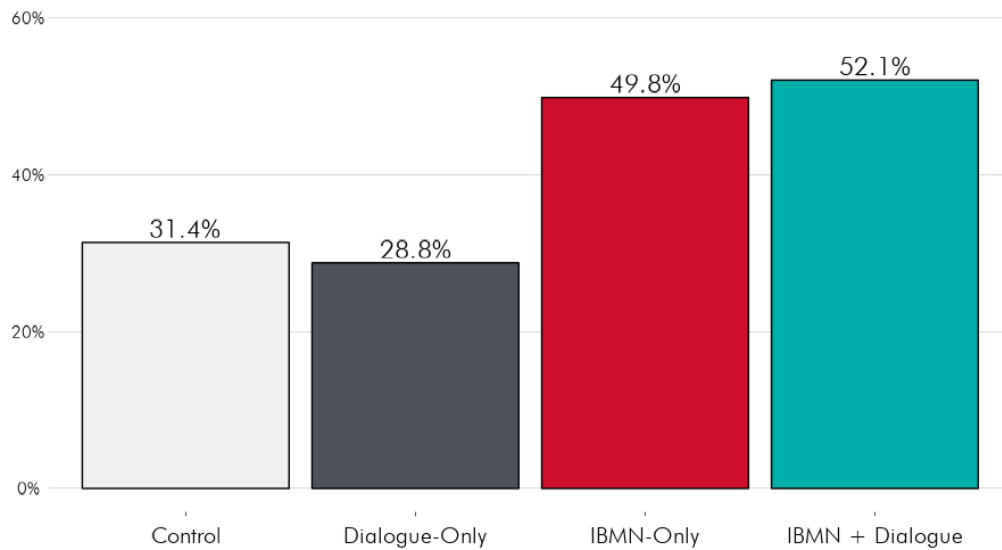
We also find that those who live in IBMN communities report greater social cohesion across behavioral, attitudinal, and normative measures. Similar to the first study, we find those who live in communities with trained leaders report more economic and social interactions with the other group (Figure 6).<sup>11</sup> However, unlike in the previous study, we also find a statistically significant difference in trust when controlling for LGA-level fixed effects as well demographic variables and baseline levels of trust (See Figures 8 and 9, below). Those who live communities with trained leaders reported greater trust in the other group and more comfort interacting with them (e.g., sharing a meal, trading, working with them).



**Figure 6. Economic Interactions with Out-Groups, By Intervention**

Lastly, we also find that those who live in communities with trained leaders are more likely to endorse positive social norms regarding inter-group interactions, as measured by perceptions that their community shares positive views about the other group. Specifically, individuals in communities with trained leaders are more likely to believe their community likes the other group, are supportive of intermarriage and are less likely to believe the other group is violent (See Figure 7).

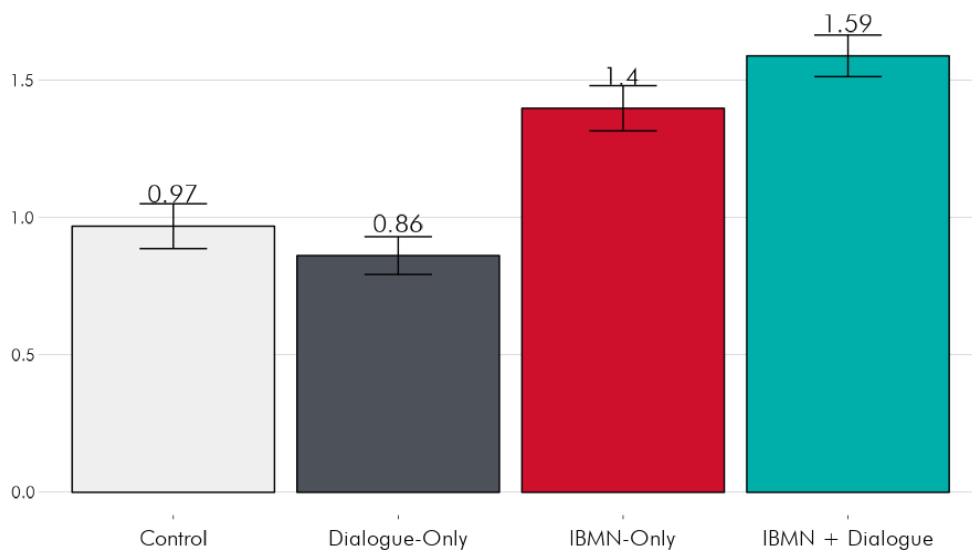
<sup>11</sup> For interactions, we were not able to control for baseline differences. For economic interactions, we only find statistically significant results when controlling for LGAs. For social interactions, we find statistically significant results for the basic model and when using controls.



**Figure 7. Belief in Shared Positive Views Towards Out-Group, By Intervention**

### How do dialogues affect violence, security, and social cohesion? (Hypothesis 2)

Unlike Hypothesis 1, we do not find support for our second set of hypotheses. Those who live in communities that engaged in dialogues did not experience less violence, more security, and more social cohesion than those in control communities. Returning to the figures above, there are no statistically significant differences between respondents that live in communities where dialogues were occurring and the control communities. In some cases, like trust, there is a slight decrease in dialogue communities, although this is not statistically significant (Figure 8).



**Figure 8. Trust in Out-Group, By Intervention Group**

## Does mediation training coupled with dialogues have an added effect on reducing violence and insecurity and increasing social cohesion? (Hypothesis 3)

We also examined whether there was an interaction effect between dialogues and mediation training—for example does the reduction in violence due to mediation create more space for more productive dialogues. In general, the combination of the two activities is stronger than mediation training and dialogues alone, for both violence and security (Figures 4 and 5), and for the attitudinal social cohesion measures (Figures 8 and 9). However, this interaction between IBMN and Dialogue is not statistically significant. Therefore, we do not find sufficient evidence to conclude that the combination of the two activities has additional benefit over mediation alone.

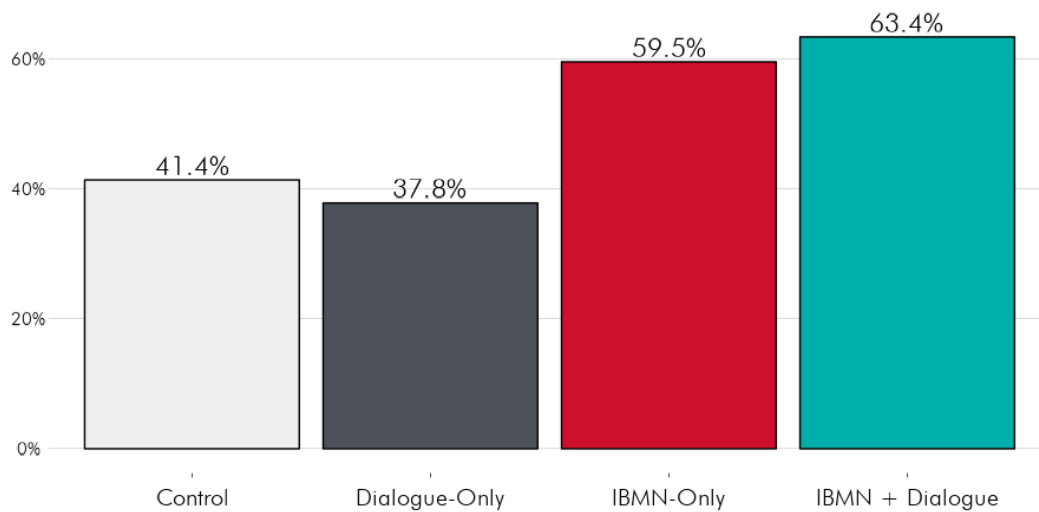


Figure 9. Comfort with Out-Group, By Intervention Group

### Demographic differences

While we are not able to reliably test whether certain groups responded to the interventions more than others, we do examine whether there are overall differences across gender, age, religious and occupational groups. In general, we do not find a clear and consistent pattern of differences across demographic categories. For example, women are more likely to report farmer-herder issues, but do not report a difference in violent events or avoiding going to areas occupied by the other group. Herders are more likely to report violent events and farmer-herder issues, but not less likely to avoid certain areas. However, we do find that Muslims are less likely to experience violent events, feel more secure, and feel more social cohesion than Christians in our sample.

## Alternative Explanations

One concern with a reliance on survey and self-report measures is that respondents may feel pressured to respond in a specific way (i.e., sensitivity bias) or in line with how the researchers expect (i.e., demand effects). While recent studies demonstrate that those concerns are often inflated (See Blair et al 2020; Mummulo and Peterson, 2019), and that respondents in the dialogue communities were not significantly different than control communities, we conducted several placebo tests to see if perhaps those in IBMN communities responded overall more positively to questions due to the fact that they received an intervention for a longer period of time.

We used questions on voting in the upcoming election, and concerns about pre- and post-election violence for the placebo test. These questions were added to the survey to understand the general feeling about the approaching election. However, we did not hypothesize that the interventions would affect people's answers on these questions as the activities did not directly target these issues. We detect no statistically significant differences on all three placebo measures across the three intervention conditions (See Appendix 2 for regression results). Therefore, we are confident that the results from the study are due to real changes and not respondent biases.

## 6. Discussion

Almost three years after the initial meditation training, communities with trained leaders experience lower levels of violence and insecurity than those who live in communities without trained leaders. They also report more positive attitudes about the other group, interact with the other group more socially and economically, and believe that their own group members endorse more positive social norms than those who live in communities without trained leaders. In contrast, communities that only engaged in dialogues saw little change compared to those who received no peacebuilding interventions. We also find that while the combination of the two interventions showed slightly stronger results, this difference was not statistically significant. Below we provide further discussion and interpretation of the results, highlighting where our hypotheses were confirmed and where we were surprised.

### **Why were social cohesion effects stronger in this study than in our previous study?**

We hypothesized that mediation would have a positive effect on both sets of outcomes. These hypotheses were largely confirmed. What was surprising was that many of the social cohesion effects that were not significant in our initial study were now statistically significant. In Study 1, we found that a year after the mediation training, individuals in communities where leaders were trained in mediation reported interacting more with the other group. However, there were limited effects on other social cohesion measures, in particular, a limited and not statistically significant effect on trust. One possibility is that in the three years since the initial CIPP mediation training, lower levels of violence created space for even more interactions, and more opportunities for positive interactions that could shift attitudes. Additionally, with lower levels of violence, it is likely that community members experienced or learned about fewer incidents that confirm previously held beliefs about the group, making it easier to change attitudes (Nickerson 1998).

One question this raises is whether attitudes are slower to change than behaviors. For example, in contrast with our findings here, studies involving Muslims and Christians in Iraq (Mousa 2020) and Northern Nigeria (Scacco and Warren 2018), found that contact shifted behaviors but not attitudes. Both interventions were

shorter than the first CIPP study (2 and 4 months respectively). Perhaps with more time, repeated behaviors lead to more attitude change; people watch themselves behave a certain way, and through that self-perception, begin to think their attitudes must be consistent with their behavior (Bem 1973). Future research should examine the different time scales needed for behavior and attitude change.

## Why didn't dialogues work on either set of outcomes?

Similar to mediation training, we expected dialogues to affect both social cohesion and violence and security. While dialogues were implemented for a shorter period of time than mediation training (1 vs 3 years), and that may be a reason why we do not see results for dialogues, we did see effects from mediation after one year in Study 1. We believe there are two main reasons our hypotheses were not confirmed.

**A light dose:** Over 16 months, there were at least six dialogue events per community. These dialogues involved a range of people. Some dialogue events involved as few as 15 people; others involved up to 100. These dialogues were mostly one day, one-off events, involving different people, rather than the same core people over time. In a similar intervention in Lebanon—both in substance and timeframe—participants' knowledge about the other group increased, but there were no shifts in attitudes and behaviors (Paler et al 2020). Another dialogue intervention in Ethiopia had stronger results, where there were some changes in attitudes; a main difference is that the same set of participants in this intervention met 12-14 times over 6-7 months (Svensson & Broneus 2013).

A major difference between the Lebanon and Ethiopia studies and this one is that in those other studies, the direct participants were the ones evaluated. In this study, it was the community that was surveyed, meaning that the sample included some individuals who participated in peacebuilding events (including dialogues) and those who didn't participate at all. Given that the dose was weak, like in the Lebanon study, the changes for the direct participants in dialogues were likely minimal, and therefore, were unlikely to spread to the wider community.

In a previous RCT of the USAID-funded Engaging Peaceful Communities in Nigeria (ECPN) program in North Central Nigeria, Mercy Corps examined dosage by looking at direct and indirect participants, assuming direct participants receive a stronger dose of the intervention than indirect participants, and that indirect participants receive more of a dose than the comparison group. In the ECPN program, participants in joint committees, which included dialogues about the causes of conflict between their communities, met bi-weekly during farming and harvest season and weekly during dry season for over 18 months. In that study, we found that direct participants changed more than indirect participants, and that indirect participants changed more than control (Dawop et al 2018; Grady et al 2023). Moreover, unlike the Lebanon and Ethiopia studies, in the ECPN study, we found changes in both attitudes (i.e., trust) and behavior (e.g., market interactions, self-reported interactions), again, possibly due to the stronger dose. Future work should examine the number and intensity of dialogues needed to increase social cohesion.

**No explicit path between dialogue processes and wider community change:** An additional reason we likely see weak effects for dialogues is that there was little explicit theory for how the dialogues would influence the wider community. Since it is unrealistic for interventions to directly reach everyone, programs often assume that spread will happen between direct and indirect participants. However, few programs are explicit about how that wider change will happen.

One reason we examined direct and indirect participants in the ECPN study is that we wanted to understand how wider change occurs. Based on the results, we theorized that there were three reasons that we saw

community wide effects from dialogues, but underlying all these reasons was changes in social norms, which are influential for behavior change (Miller and Prentice 2015). The first reason we believe we saw changes in social norms was that people engaged in dialogue repeatedly. This likely resulted in bigger changes in behaviors and attitudes than we see in this and other studies. Because of how strong the change was among direct participants, they may have been more vocal about what they were experiencing, shifting norms about appropriate interactions between groups. Also, since these dialogues occurred repeatedly over time, it created more opportunities for others—friends, family—to learn about positive interactions with the other group from direct participants. For example, family members likely heard about what happened during the weekly or bi-weekly meetings.

Additionally, those who participated in the dialogues tended to be well connected in their respective communities. Community leaders, women leaders, and youth leaders were encouraged to participate in the dialogues. By targeting leaders and influencers, the changes the direct participants experienced through dialogues likely spilled over to the wider community through their networks. Since these participants were leaders, they were also more visible to the wider community. People witnessed them interacting with the other side, shifting perceptions of norms. For example, in a study on reducing school-based conflict and bullying, students who were more well connected had significantly more influence on school norms (Paluck et al 2016).

Lastly, that dialogues and the outcomes of dialogues were public also likely influenced social norms. Public information is more likely to shift norms (Adida et al 2020; Arias 2019; Grossman and Michelitch 2018; Paluck 2009). The publicness of the dialogues in the ECPN program also created opportunities for the direct participants to be role models for their communities. While we recognize that public engagement across conflict lines may not be practical or safe in a number of conflict settings, the ability of dialogues or similar processes to contribute to wider change may remain limited unless they can contribute to changing norms, which is hard to do without some form of public information. This does not mean that dialogue processes are not useful in such situations; it may mean the focus of change is on direct versus indirect participants, with the hope that these processes lay the groundwork for some point in the future when it may be safe for processes to be more public. Future work should more examine the role of dose, networks, and publicness of the intervention in shifting norms and contributing to wider societal change.

## 7. Recommendations

**Based on these results, we recommend the following:**

***Continue to 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. We see that investing in mediation training helps the community as a whole, going beyond those who are directly affected by the training. Moreover, mediation also supports social and economic interaction between groups, and it appears that the combination of the reduction in violence and increased interactions over time contributed to people shifting their attitudes about the other group.

We also see that the results from the first study held for additional two years, with additional mentoring and coaching. That we see lower levels of violence in IBMN communities compared to control three years after the initial training illustrates the potential sustainability and cost-effectiveness of these interventions. In this context, training and mentoring 340 leaders over the course of three years cost approximately USD 60,000 and an additional USD 25,000 for refreshers. Alternative methods for securing communities, such as

expanding policing or guarding land, are much more expensive. Based on this evidence of effectiveness and sustainability, as well as relative 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.

***Consider more intensive dialogue interventions with influencers to promote greater attitudinal and behavioral change.*** We attribute the inability of the dialogue intervention to affect the wider community to the “light dosage” of this intervention. In this programming context, dialogues were designed as one-off sessions with different groups of participants selected from the community at large. This approach led to very little change. Based on other research on the effectiveness of dialogues and similar interventions, we recommend that dialogues involve the same well-connected individuals over time to provide people with sufficient opportunity to learn about each other, understand each other’s perspectives, and begin to formulate a new group identity. We recognize that many programs face pressure to reach as many people as possible with interventions as part of output-focused monitoring targets. However, since dialogues themselves are not scalable, we believe reaching many people with a light dose is not a cost-effective use of donor funds. Instead, we believe it is more effective to focus on shifting the behaviors and attitudes of a few well-connected people and then incorporate other elements to reach wider change.

***Incorporate evidence from behavioral science in programs to support broader societal change.*** Peacebuilding programs often expect that change at the individual will lead to change at societal level. Yet without intentionality about how that spread occurs, that wider change tends to be limited. Behavioral science provides insights into how change moves from individuals to the collective. For example, research shows that social norms, which develop through public information, role models, and networks, are influential in changing people's behavior at scale. Future programming and research should investigate how to cost-effectively combine community-level interventions with mass communication campaigns (e.g., radio; social media) to increase the likelihood that changes that occur among intervention participants leads to greater societal change.



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