

Engendering Social Capital: Perspectives from Rural Development Networks in Uganda

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Abstract · This paper examines the link between gender, social capital and rural development in Uganda. Noting that gender relations involve struggles over control of strategic resources and relationships, it highlights the complex interrelationships between power, resources, social networks and collaborations in the analysis of social capital. In so doing, the paper examines the impact of these (ongoing) processes of resistance, negotiation, social networks, collaborations and interdependency on rural development programmes in the country.

Keywords · Gender · Social capital · Rural development

Parité du Genre dans le Capital Social: Perspectives de Réseaux du Développement Rural en Ouganda · Résumé · Cet article examine les liens entre le genre, le capital social et le développement rural en Ouganda. Notant que les relations relatives au genre comprennent des conflits relatifs aux ressources and alliances stratégiques, cet article démontre les complexes alliances entre le pouvoir, ressources réseaux sociaux et collaborations dans l'analyse du capital social. Dans cette poursuite, l'article examine l'impact de ces processus (continuels) de résistance, négociation, réseaux sociaux, collaborations, et interdépendance aux programmes du développement rural dans le pays. **Mots Clé** · Genre · Capital social · Développement rural

Introduction

The concept of social capital has been increasingly central in development literature (Woolcock and Narayan, 2002; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). The strength of social capital as a construct for understanding development lies in its interpersonal and inter-group character. Social networks² have value, and this is expressed with the term social capital (Putnam, 2000). The concept social capital is relatively new within the development studies, and its relevance is recognised by researchers and policy makers only since the past twenty years. It can be roughly defined by

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² Social network is connectedness among individuals and social groups that facilitates collaboration and equitable resource distribution at the household, community and state level. Social network is essential for societal stability and for easing the material and psychological stress of Poverty (Narayan et al., 2000). It also affirms individual and group identities and includes the less powerful.



'institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development' (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002). Social capital is important since it is at the core of the development studies, bridging economics and sociology, and because it has strong policy implications.

Social capital can be related to the broader concept of rural resilience, which is defined as 'the capacity of a rural region to adapt to changing external circumstances in such a way that a satisfactory standard of living is maintained' (Heijman et al., 2007). High levels of social capital not only lead to more sustainable development, but also to more rural resilience. The traditional composition of natural, physical or produced capital and human capital needs to be broadened to include social capital. The internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people and the institutions in which they are embedded are vital synergy for rural development.

The paper discusses the leading thoughts on the definition of the concept of social capital and the role social capital plays in rural development from a gendered perspective. It highlights the relationship between social capital and development and then links social capital to rural development with illustration from farmers association and women's grassroots organisations.

Theorising Social Capital and Rural Development

Defining Social Capital

Social capital refers to aspects of social organisation, including social networks and norms of reciprocity and trust that facilitate cooperation and the accomplishment of goals. It is a resource created and accumulated through repeated everyday interactions among and between individuals. It includes not only the social networks and connections among individuals, but also the physical and political context that supports network development and the resources produced. Incorporated in this definition are two related, but disparate, notions of social capital. One notion relates to social capital as a structural resource and examines resources that individuals access as a result of their membership in a particular social structure. The other notion refers to the nature and extent of one's involvement in relationships, regardless of context. Both conceptualisations share a focus on the productive potential of social capital i.e. social capital makes possible the achievement of ends that might be impossible in its absence.

The first view of social capital takes a social structural approach, viewing social capital as something realised through interactions embedded in a particular social and political context. In this view, social capital is neither owned nor embodied by particular individuals or groups, but is a structural resource available to individuals for personal gain. Whereas economic and human capital are the property of individuals, social capital is an emergent property of relationships. Unlike other forms of capital, individuals both contribute to social capital and use it, but they cannot own it (Bourdieu, 1985).

Bourdieu's definition implies the deliberate investment of individuals in a network for later personal use or access with an unspecified obligation of reciprocity. According to Coleman (1988), social capital is the aspect of social structure that facilitates actions of individuals and institutions within social structure. Coleman believed that social capital had the potential to strengthen community social fabric because it builds bonds based on information, trust, and solidarity among people, most often as by-products of their activities.

The second view of social capital theory, popularised by Putnam (1993), focuses on the norms of trust and reciprocity that emerge from interactions among individuals, regardless of social structural context. Social capital is redefined in this school of thought as an attribute that individuals or groups either possess or do not possess. Here, social capital refers to the collective value of social connections and the inclinations that arise from these relationships to accomplish mutual goals. Individual gain might result, but social capital is more importantly related to the achievement of collective ends. Within this view, three dimensions of social capital are defined as bonding, bridging, and linking.

The dimensions are not either-or categories, but differences in the ratio of the three may yield different outcomes. Bonding social capital refers to ties among like individuals who generally share similar socio-demographic characteristics. Bridging social capital refers to ties among dissimilar individuals, while linking social capital refers to one's ties to authority, such as public or private institutions. Bridging and linking social capital are thought to contribute to a productive and well-functioning civil society because both types increase opportunities for civic participation, broaden networks of exchange, and increase access to resources. Bonding social capital, on the other hand, has the potential to create strong group identities, boundaries, and intolerance of outsiders. Bonding social capital may also foster group norms that are so powerful that they restrict individual choice and freedom by disallowing exit from the group and creating strong demands for conformity.

Putnam (1993), introduced the idea that social capital carries with it social rewards, such as the better functioning of society. His view holds that when people share a sense of identity, possess similar views, trust each other, and act reciprocally for mutual benefit, social capital exists. The presence of social capital impacts on the social, political, and economic nature of society in which it exists. Thus, Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital has gained prominence with those interested in society and governance.

Social capital is defined by social interactions and their by-products such as trust relations, reciprocity and exchanges, common rules and norms, and networks and groups. These collective by-products are usually beneficial for society as a whole. In communities where people share trust and reciprocity, interaction is way more easy and efficient than in communities where people do not even know their neighbours (Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Uslaner 2001). In many rural communities in Uganda, social networks serve as unofficial insurance systems. Social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity.

Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002) built a useful framework that defines the concept along two different axes (see Figure 1). Along the first axis, social capital is identified at different levels, where quality of institution has been positioned at the macro level. This includes functioning of laws, incidence of conflicts, and corruption. The lower end of this axis is the social capital at the micro level, which is about relationships among individuals and households. For example, the extended family, friends and the relationships among neighbours. The meso level includes networks between individuals and larger structures like farmers' cooperatives. Along the second axis, Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002), distinguish structural and cognitive social capital. Structural social capital is characterised by structures that are *objective and externally visible*, like laws, courts, bingo clubs and cooperatives. Cognitive social capital is subjective and intangible, i.e. common rules and norms, trust and reciprocity. It is also possible to indicate the structural and cognitive forms of social capital with respectively official and unofficial institutions.

According to Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002), these two forms of social capital are exchangeable. When official institutions do not function properly, people will invent alternative coordination mechanisms. But when official institutions are functioning well, unofficial structures are losing importance, and official insurances will replace tight family ties, as we see in most western countries and urban areas in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, these two forms of social capital cannot exist without each other because for laws to work, people need to trust the system.

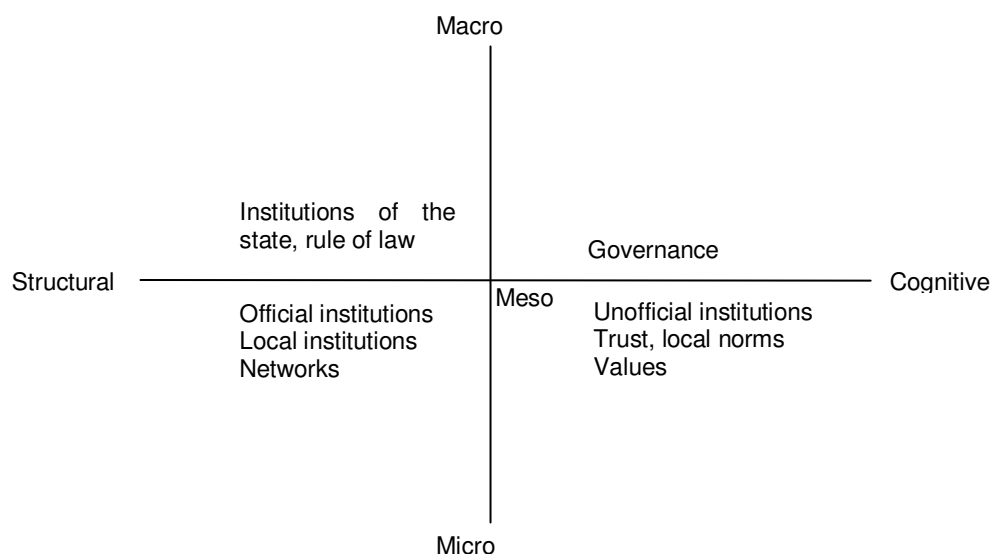


Figure 1: Forms and Scope of Social Capital

Source: Grootaert and van Bastelaer, (2002)

This whole set of trust and reciprocity, common rules and norms, at the macro and the micro level and both structural and cognitive, is called social *capital* because it functions just like other forms of capital like money in a few aspects. It accumulates as a stock that in turn produces benefit, it needs initial investment and regular maintenance, and it is more easily broken down than rebuilt. Social capital distinguishes itself from financial capital, as people need to build it up together, and because it does not devalue because of use, but rather because of *lack* of use (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002). Social capital is self-reinforcing when reciprocity increases connectedness between people, leading to greater trust, confidence and capacity to innovate.

Social Capital and Rural Development

The existence of social capital is very important for economic growth and development. A growing body of evidence indicates that the size and density of social networks and institutions, and the nature of interpersonal interactions, significantly affect the efficiency and sustainability of development programmes. Yet the exact channels through which social capital impacts developmental outcomes have only begun to be explored, and the lessons to be drawn from these observations for programme design and implementation remain to be formulated (World Bank, 2009).

Social capital is significant because it affects rural people's capacity to organise for development. Social capital helps groups plan, mobilise resources, manage resources coordinate activities and resolve conflicts (Uphoff, 1986). In rural communities, social ties are often strong and longstanding. Informal ties and social norms provide essential safety nets. Social capital is a mediator for collective action and can help people build common property resources, such as fresh water wells (Ostrom, 1990). Not only can social capital improve access to natural resources, it can also improve access to physical capital.

Perhaps one of the most telling contributions of social capital is conceptual because it adds a social dimension to the development equation of capital that has been mostly ignored in economic explorations of determinants of poverty and household welfare (Narayan, 1997). The positive impact of social capital is now well recognised by governments and development agencies that increasingly use decentralisation and participatory strategies in their rural development activities.

Enforceable group norms are not necessarily good for community members. Traditions can stifle individual growth and creativity. Individuals and members their families who do not comply with norms can be ridiculed or ousted from the community. For example, some rural communities

pressure elites who have moved to urban areas to donate money and services to the community. Elites depend on the ethnic community in the village where they grew up and at the same time the community also depends on the elites to take care of them in illness and old age, especially in countries which have no formal safety nets. Elites therefore maintain a social presence in the rural community by service (Bates, 1989).

Despite the clear relationships that were described above, putting theory into practise is not that straightforward at all. Social capital clearly has to come from within the society, and cannot be implemented 'top down' by governments or development organisations. If there is no intrinsic social capital in the form of trust and willingness to cooperate, investments in the community will inevitably fail the endless flows of investments in proverbial bottomless pits bear witness.

In this paper I have used two illustrations to demonstrate the application of social capital and rural development in Uganda. In the first case I have looked at farmers association as a functional form of social capital and rural development. In the second case we examine women's group as a synergy for networks, collaboration³ and development.

i) Farmers Association in Rural Uganda

The majority of the rural communities are dependent on agriculture for employment and household income. Rural farmers require internal as well as external capacity to be successful (Sorensen, 2000). External capacity describes the farmers' ability to negotiate with other actors and the internal capacity refers to efficient management of resources (Sorensen, 2000; Bebbington, 1998). If these two factors are combined, they can increase the income and productivity of the farmers.

Social capital in the form of local level farmers associations, networks or cooperatives can provide the environment necessary for rural development. For example, in the vast areas of the West Nile region of Uganda, farmers practice open field system of agriculture. In this kind of arrangement, households cultivate a number of scattered and unfenced strips of gardens. When the harvest is over, the gardens become an open field for grazing their animals. This kind of arrangement ensures effective network and collaboration between women and men. The process also ensures that women and men harvested their seasonal crops and at the same time fed their animals thus minimising wastage of resources.

ii) Women's Grassroots Organisations

The different positions that women and men occupy in social structures have far reaching implications for women's and men's access to formal and informal institutions (Nayaran, 2000). The most important institutions in poor people's lives are often gender segregated and when development interventions do not factor in these differences, women may emerge as losers from such development interventions.

Women in rural Uganda have used their small organisations to exchange information, training and sharing experiences to empower themselves. They have also been able to access financial resources from different organisations to fill up the gap of resource needs. The institutional structure and relationships within and outside the women's organisations greatly affect the process of women's participation, access and control of resources. This also leads to empowerment since it eliminates wasteful deployment of energy and resources.

Owa-Mataze (2004), conducted a study of a women's community based group⁴ "Abakyara Busesiire", meaning Women the sun has risen, in Rukoni sub county, Ruhaama County in Ntugamo district, which provides a good example of functionality of social capital and rural development.

³ Collaboration is the level of solidarity among household or group members in situation of need, specific incentives or purposes including access to credit, agricultural inputs, land, access to decision making, mutual help and opportunities to socialise (Westermann, 2002).

⁴ Community based groups command confidence and creates sense of ownership and the feeling that the organisations are responsive to their priorities. Indigenous identity based on ethnicity, clan gender and age lays the foundation for the evolvement of women's groups (Nayaran, 2000).

The study revealed that the main objective of the women's group was to raise the socio-economic condition of the poor and the marginalised and empowerment through micro-credit small savings and credit as their main strategy.

The study also revealed that the activities of the organisation have greatly improved the relationships between the group members and their husbands. The group members were resourceful and their work earned them recognition and respect within their families, group and society. The studies demonstrated that "Abakyara Busesiire" although initiated by women incorporated all members of society and served as the arena for negotiation, social networks, collaborations resource sharing, and interdependency between women and men.

Gender and Social Capital

Women and men commonly depend on different kinds of social relations or networks (Neuhouser, 1995; Agrawal, 2000). Women are often more dependent on informal networks based on everyday forms of collaboration such as collecting water, fetching fuel wood and child rearing. Such informal networks provide solidarity and access to household resources like water and firewood. Men are often engaged in more formal networks, such as project groups and community councils that improve access to economic resources and decision-making (Agrawal, 2000).

Women and men may value collaboration differently. Women often have more everyday experiences of informal collaboration based on reciprocal relationships and higher dependence on social relations for access to household resources (Cleaver, 1998; Agrawal, 2000). At the same time, it is often assumed that women reveal more relational and altruistic behaviour due to their role and responsibility for reproduction (Folbre, 1994; and White, 1992), and are less motivated by selfish individualism while men are more individualistic and more engaged in formal collaboration, decision-making and organised power structures. Women are better able to overcome social division and conflicts (Cleaver, 1998; Agrawal, 2000), because of their greater interdependency and their everyday experiences of collaboration.

However, the gender division in social networks carries significant costs for both women and men. While women tend to be isolated from production networks, men are isolated from those informal institutions that may provide for emotional wellbeing (Nayaran, 2000). More often poor men are left struggling to maintain their positions in local society. According to Armenia (1995), honour requires the men to earn enough financial and material resources to support their wives and children and to maintain the family's position in the community by public demonstrations of prosperity.

Gender and the Household

Within the household, gender relations involve ongoing struggles over control of strategic resources and relationships. It is therefore important to bring the complex interrelations of power, knowledge, and agency in the analysis of social capital. By doing so, it is possible to explore how these interrelations that operates in everyday life, impact on rural development programmes through the ongoing processes of negotiation and resistance within gender relations.

A focus on the gendered division of roles, responsibilities, rights, and interests contextualises changes in rural development (Leach, 1991). The ideas of "relations of production" and "relations in production" the former understood as property relations and the latter as labour processes (Carney and Watts, 1990) provide important conceptual tools for understanding local rural development issues. For example, gender analysis has illustrated that people with secure tenure rights invest in land with a long-term view, but their ability to do so can be compromised by lack of access to economic or other resources vital to the maintenance of their livelihoods (Mackenzie, 1995; Leach, 1991). Within relations of production, gender analysis of availability of labour shows us how tasks are divided and how work is sequenced or segregated between women's and men's crops and space. Gender analysis also shows us the links between division of labour and right to access resources, and how they change in value over time.

Studies conducted by Esuruku (2003) in the West Nile region of Uganda revealed that among the Madi, women and men had their allotted places in the immediate and extended family organisation. Men wielded unlimited authority and occupied the highest echelons of influence relative to women who were seen as nurturers and caregivers. Valuable properties such as livestock, household implements, wealth acquired through agriculture or trade although communally owned were controlled by men. Although things such as house, courtyard, and granaries were considered as belonging to women, in the actual fact they belonged to the men.

While aspects of decision-making reveal a lot about how gender relations impinge on rural development, Leach (1991), argues that they also hide a lot. Many people are not making decisions that they necessarily like, but are dealing with dilemmas and constraints in a context of socio political issues. In this way, coping with changes in the political economy and new social contexts (in response to broader changes) means coping with emerging dilemmas and problems. This has implications for gender relations in rural development. As much as coping mechanisms and decision-making processes are affected by household production, they are bound up in context-specific notions about relations between husband and wife; among members of an extended family; and among neighbours (Leach, 1991; Crowley, 1994).

Access to Household Resources

Gendered access to resources, distribution, and control is commonly, although not exclusively, negotiated at the level of the household. The household is a site that represents to both women and men a channel of access to productive resources such as land, labour and income. It is also a space where other important social relationships intersect. To understand the gendered options and opportunities available for rural development, it is important to explore the processes by which household members gain access to and control over resources that are available to the household as a whole, and the forms of negotiation, bargaining, and conflict that occur between household members.

Evans (1991), points out that households are often shifting, flexible structures in which boundaries are difficult to discern. Indeed, the sheer cross-cultural diversity of household forms almost defies definition. This diversity extends to various aspects of the household. For instance, family and household composition, and the ways by which social relations are mediated through kinship, marriage, and other social institutions, all create a variety of conjugal and residential arrangements (Evans, 1991). Heterogeneous household forms can include polygamous households, female-headed households, or clusters of households that are part of larger compounds and extended family units. Furthermore, patterns and channels of access to resources cannot always be located or confined to the household.

The household which is an important socially constructed concept offers a point of departure for gender analysis. Its activities may not have a single locus, and any one locus does not necessarily represent a single unit of labour or resources (Esuruku, 2003). Nonetheless, the household remains a valuable concept for exploring the effects of different gendered interests, options, and social relationships on rural development.

The conjugal contract, defined as the terms by which spouses exchange goods, incomes, and services including labour, is a useful concept for drawing out these issues. It focuses attention on the changing nature of these terms according to broader changes in the political economy (Whitehead, 1981). The conjugal contract varies depending on factors such as cultural patterns of inheritance and residence (Evans, 1991) and on the extent to which resources are joined or pooled, or dealt with as separate holdings. Because of these types of factors, women's and men's access to resources, labour, and income may be determined by their positions in relation to complex webs of responsibilities, obligations, and rights within conjugal contracts, kinship groups, and the wider social and political-economic environments (Evans, 1991).

Recognising the fluidity of conjugal contracts makes it possible to focus on the complex interplay of power, knowledge, labour, and resource relations, and to incorporate gendered politics. The strategic and symbolic deference to patriarchal discourses, the marital and non-marital metaphors, the rhetorical struggles, the wars of words, the negotiation of symbolic representations

all these are used to configure and reconfigure gender relations, and to shift responsibilities, obligations, and rights within a changing political economy (Schroeder, 1996). Understanding the complex, overlapping rights and obligations, and the competing interests, tensions and conflicts, relations of domination, and cultural representations that produce and reproduce power relations, is crucial for understanding the politics and points of resistance associated with the control of resources (Carney and Watts, 1990).

The Household and Social Institutions

The household is also a locus for a number of relationships that take place outside the conjugal contract, such as social institutions including kinship relations, social organisations, social networks, non-sanctioned social relationships, etc. Women and men increasingly invest in social institutions such as kinship relations as diversification strategies in the face of increasingly unstable economic conditions. They offer a critical opportunity to explore struggles over resources and the way they are controlled, managed, accessed, and made available to different people (Evans, 1991; Whitehead, 1981). For instance, social organisations, such as women's groups and informal networks, are important socially sanctioned channels for accessing resources. They provide women with autonomy and freedom to pursue their own interests and projects.

Moreover, there are important links between social relationships, social institutions and patriarchy that shape the gender division of labour, property relations (Carney and Watts, 1990), and roles and responsibilities. For example, patriarchy is pervasive in influencing gender relations and the outcomes of women's struggles over resources that are vital to sustainable rural development. However, patriarchy is not fixed, monolithic, timeless, and unchanging. It is, rather, both a dominant ideology that underpins 'cultural' norms, idioms, and practices, and an inequitable social structure that shapes and permeates gender relations (Ruth, 1998). Women are not 'powerless' within the structures and ideology of patriarchy. They are actors who resist and manipulate patriarchy to access resources vital to the sustenance of their livelihoods.

Studies done by Owa-Mataze (2004), illustrated that in Uganda, grassroots women's organisations plays a very significant role. The institutional structure and relationships within and outside the GWOs greatly affect gender relations in the households. Owa-Mataze observed that although customary law still subordinates women within the traditional family and places them under the guardianship of a male relative, women through the GWOs make contribution to the welfare of their households. Men have come to appreciate the contribution of women in the welfare of the households. The GWOs response provided an avenue for dialogue between men and women.

Conclusion

Gender and social capital are core development issues today. The complex interrelationships of power, resources, social networks and collaborations in the context of gender, social capital and rural development formed the basis our discussion. This paper has illustrated how social networks, collaborations and interdependency can lead to improvement of the livelihoods of rural communities. The main argument of the paper is that women and men depend on each other in different ways although they may value collaboration differently.

In the rural context, the household has been considered as the site that represents to both women and men a channel of access to productive resources such as land, labour, income. It is also a space where other important social relationships intersect which forms the basis to understand the gendered options and opportunities available for social capital and rural development. Social capital here refers to features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.

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