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Lean on Me: Harnessing Social Capital for Resilience

Written by Xurxo Alonso Vazquez

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University	University of Galway
Supervisor	Una Murray (University of Galway) and Jenny Swatton (Concern Worldwide)
Research Questions	1. What are the key definitions and conceptual frameworks used to understand social capital and resilience building in the context of shocks? 2. What is the impact of social capital on the ability of an individual/community to build resilience to shocks in the Global South? 3. How can the impact of social capital in resilience building to shocks in the Global South be measured?

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving climatic landscape, the intensified effects of climate change are challenging many communities like never before, particularly in regions of the Global South already grappling with socio-economic vulnerabilities. Households are frequently hit by unexpected events affecting their financial stability. Given the growing awareness of climate change's impending threats, there is a pressing need to continue to strengthen the ability of local communities to ensure they can better and collectively address potential disruptions. A critical tool in this resilience-building process is social capital.

Understanding Social Capital

Social capital can be defined as 'the features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'[1]. Emphasised in the 1990s as a key element of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), social capital highlights the importance of both tangible resources (physical assets such as land, tools, and money) and social resources (e.g. the network of social relationships, community support, cooperation, and access to knowledge). These resources, skills, and proactive actions define a community's ability to sustain itself. Resilient livelihoods can not only endure but also flourish amidst adversities, all while conserving the environment.

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[1] Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy, 6*(1), 65-78.

Bonding	Fortifies existing relationships, providing both emotional and material aid during challenging times.
Bridging	Creates connections between diverse groups, offering access to crucial resources and knowledge during crises.
Linking	Promotes cooperation vertically, establishing networks of trust between communities and formal institutions like governments.

Figure 1: Three forms of social capital

Research Overview

This research provides a refreshed perspective on the linkages between social capital and resilience[2]. A rapid literature review, focusing on peer-reviewed articles post-2015, aligned these findings with the latest global development frameworks. This timeframe encapsulated recent global milestones including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). Analysing project documents and evaluation reports from projects implementing Concern's Graduation Approach in 5 African countries – Burundi, Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Zambia – helped to identify and understand outcomes and indicators that could measure the impact of social capital.

The Impact of Social Capital in Resilience Building

Social capital plays a pivotal role in enhancing resilience, something that is particularly evident in areas such as disaster preparedness, food security, and even in reshaping gender norms that restrict responses in some communities. Community ties, deeply rooted in social capital, enable societies to predict, counter, and recover from adversities. Examples from Ghana[3] and Pakistan[4] show communities deftly navigating environmental adversities, leaning into their shared bonds for strength. Communities underpinned by robust social capital can navigate environmental and socio-economic intricacies while fostering a culture of trust, enhancing social bonds, and facilitating the flow of knowledge.

In exploring social networks, 2 concepts emerge as significant – 'degree centrality' (the number of direct connections an individual possesses in a network) and 'betweenness centrality' (referring to how individuals can create a bridge to other networks). These metrics emphasise the importance of both direct connections and mediating roles in building resilience; aspects that were previously demonstrated in research conducted in urban India[55] and rural Sri Lanka[6].
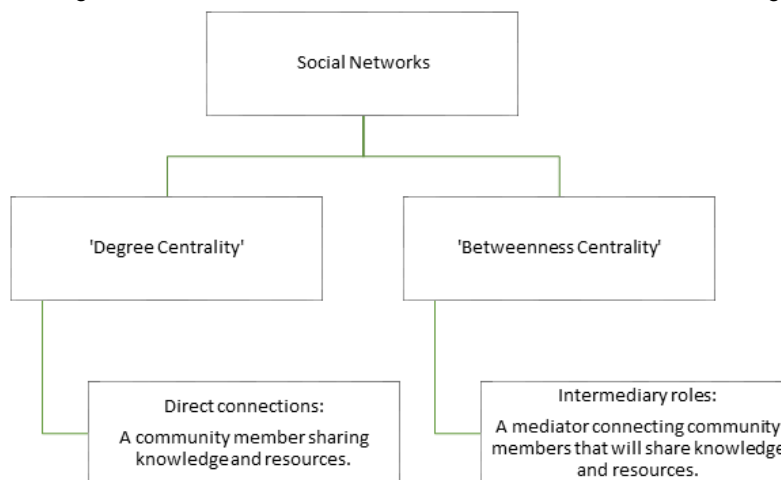

Figure 2: Measurements in social networks analysis.

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[2] Concern (2015) definition of resilience is the ability of all vulnerable households or individuals that make up a community to anticipate, respond to, cope with, and recover from the effects of shocks and to adapt to stresses in a timely and effective manner without compromising their long-term prospects of moving out of poverty.

[3] Dapilah, F., Nielsen, J. Ø., & Friis, C. (2020). The role of social networks in building adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change: A case study from northern Ghana. *Climate and Development*, *12*(1), 42-56.

[4] Shah, A., Ye, J., Shaw, R., Ullah, R., & Ali, M. (2020). Factors affecting flood-induced household vulnerability and health risks in Pakistan: The case of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 42*, 101341.

[5] Roy, D., & Lees, M. (2020). Understanding resilience in slums using an agent-based model. *Computers, Environment and Urban Systems, 80*, 101458.

[6] Dasanayaka, U., & Matsuda, Y. (2022). Role of social capital in local knowledge evolution and transfer in a network of rural communities coping with landslide disasters in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 67*, 102630.

In tumultuous times, social capital proves instrumental in ensuring food security. Bonding social capital, as demonstrated in academic research in Zimbabwe[7] and Bangladesh[8], aids communities in warding off external disruptions by amplifying food security through the support of familiar sources. There is an increased acknowledgement of women's important role in community unity and resilience. Despite barriers, more women are leading and navigating spaces previously dominated by men. Yet there is a need to reinforce bridging (members of the same community supporting each other) and linking (leveraging institutional support, which can be fundamental for sustainability) social capital to achieve and maintain food security during shocks.

Measuring the Impact of Social Capital

Concern's Graduation Approach is designed to help individuals move out of extreme poverty by providing a comprehensive package of support – comprising of cash transfers, technical and business skills training, access to finance and mentoring to combat food scarcity and vulnerability – with the goal to create sustainable livelihood pathways.

Initiatives such as the Terintambwe programme in Burundi aim to infuse social capital through community interactions, thus growing community resilience. This programme increased participation in community structures, such as School Management Committees (SMC), Community Health Committees (COSA), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) meetings, and Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs) because of the following:

- Ability to make financial contributions to these events

- Receiving more respect within the community

- Having more free time due to the shift away from agricultural day labour

However, challenges such as resentment and jealousy from non-participants and entrenched gender hierarchies surfaced. These issues underscored the necessity to ensure equal opportunities for all members to participate in community life, which may be pivotal to sustainably building social capital.

By enhancing social capital via community involvement, resilience is increased, as evidenced in the Terintambwe programme. Together with the Graduation Model and Gender Empowerment programme in Malawi, the programmes demonstrate how resilience can be increased via social capital, even with entrenched gender hierarchies. Programme evaluators, however, noted that community envy, particularly amongst those not included in Concern's activities, can be challenging.

Reviewing programme documents and evaluation reports of Concern's 5 Graduation programmes, a set of indicators used throughout the programmes to measure social capital are as follows:

- % of target households whose members are in an association or cooperative.

- % of target households whose members are involved in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) meetings.

- % of DRR committees that have developed a mitigation plan meeting minimum standard.

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[7] Manyanga, M., Murendo, C., Pedzisa, T., Mutyasira, V., & Ndou, R. (2023). Resilience capacities and implications for food security in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, African journal of agricultural and resource economics, 2023.

[8] Smith, L., & Frankenberger, T. (2018). Does Resilience Capacity Reduce the Negative Impact of Shocks on Household Food Security? Evidence from the 2014 Floods in Northern Bangladesh. *World Development, 102*, 358-376.

- % of women who are members of the Area Development Committees (ACDs), Farmers Associations (FA) and Satellite Disaster Management Committees (SDMCs).

To understand the impact that the programme has had on social capital, it should be measured at baseline, mid-line and end-line data collection to ensure an appropriate understanding of the positive factors resulting from implementing the graduation programme, as well as recording the challenges faced.

Additional indicators used in other Graduation programmes could be used to measure social capital, for example in Rwanda where the following indicators were used to measure levels of participant empowerment:

- Engagement in social events in the community.

- Involvement in leadership roles in the community.

- Ability to influence decisions within the community.

A recommendation from this research is to measure the qualitative aspects of social capital in all Graduation Programmes.

Conclusions

Social capital is multifaceted. This research found that both academic and practical on-the-ground initiatives such as Concern's Graduation programming, validate the importance of social capital when focusing on DRR, food security, and vulnerability mitigation.

Social capital's threefold structure – bonding, bridging, and linking – fosters trust, cooperation, and access to resources during adversities. Yet, the benefits are often context-specific and influenced by cultural and socio-economic dynamics. It is important to understand that quantitative indicators can tell us whether there is an increase in social capital. However, using qualitative methodologies to explore the underlying mechanisms of how social capital is built might provide information on the quality of connections.
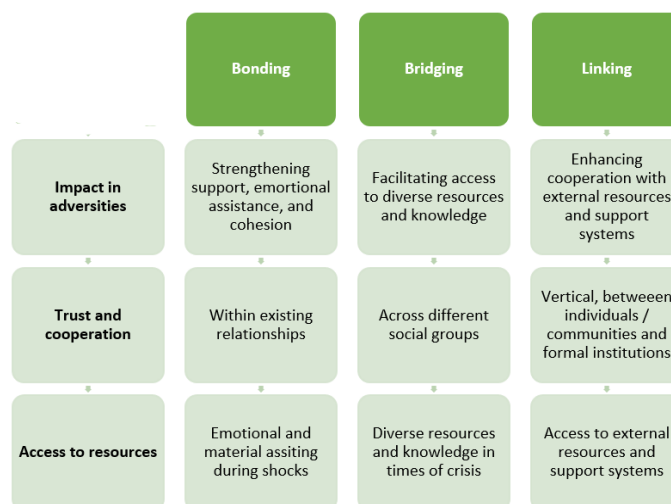
	Bonding	Bridging	Linking
Impact in adversities	Strengthening support, emortional assistance, and cohesion	Facilitating access to diverse resources and knowledge	Enhancing cooperation with external resources and support systems
Trust and cooperation	Within existing relationships	Across different social groups	Vertical, betweeen individuals / communities and formal institutions
Access to resources	Emotional and material assiting during shocks	Diverse resources and knowledge in times of crisis	Access to external resources and support systems

Figure 2: Social Capital's Threefold Structure

The following could be measured to provide information on the impact of social capital on a Graduation programme:

- Trust and reciprocity indicate a mutual reliance and willingness to support one another.

- Knowledge and information exchange demonstrate if the communication between network members is open, honest, and happens regularly.

- Diversity of the network, including various perspectives and experiences.

- Inclusivity and equity assess the fairness of the network. This could ensure that all members have equal access and participation, paying special attention to gender equality.

- Resilience and adaptability examine the network's ability to adapt and innovate in response to challenges or changes.

As the world grapples with escalating challenges, integrating social capital considerations into policies and interventions can be a keystone for building stronger, more resilient communities. To achieve this, this research suggests the following steps are undertaken:

(i) foster community participation with inclusive community involvement.

(ii) promote gender-inclusive activities to ensure equality and fairness among community members; this might help to tackle jealousy from non-participants.

(iii) use quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure the impact of social capital in Graduation programmes; and

(iv) support community initiatives where individuals interact and engage, reinforcing bonds and networks.